

**Self-care in the Age of Neoliberalism:
An Auto-ethnographic Exploration
by a Counsellor**

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Masters in Counselling

by

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- Māori proverb

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Abstract

This thesis explores the self-care of a counsellor, myself, in the age of neo-liberalism. The underpinning structure is Dewey's developmental spiral (1933) that enables me to use the writing of this thesis as a reflective process. This practice consists of reflecting on past experience, exploring and critiquing the influence of neoliberalism as a significant hindrance in maintaining effective self-care. I also deconstruct relevant discursive formations by employing the theoretical approaches that are positioned in the social constructionist arena, and consult the writings of Foucault, De Certeau, Wittgenstein, and other theorists. I revisit personal historical occurrences linking them to societal settings. For this I use auto-ethnography as the methodology, exploring my adoption of early discursive formations and in particular the way I used work as a coping mechanism. For the conceptualisation that describes new constructive ways of being, I use the solution-focused therapeutic approach to overcome the problems of being enmeshed with the discussed hegemonic discourses. The last part of the Dewey's developmental spiral explores new experiences that have been influenced by the reflective process described earlier. The aim of this thesis is to develop a framework of understanding to advance self-care practices that may also serve as an inspirational tool for others to use in their own unique situations.

PART 1

General Information for the Reader

In this thesis I use an auto-ethnographic approach, which is a methodology that uses the subjective voice and recollections of the researcher as research data. Throughout the chapters I use a different *font in italics* to indicate the place of such sections. There are also photographs and a diagram inserted into the text that are intended to emphasise the discussions in the main text. The personal voice is part of the reflective process. It is not claiming to be right or wrong, rather I intend for it to promote discussion and inspire new ways of looking at the care for the self within the context of my subjective experience.

Chapter 1: Political Aspects

“Power is everywhere and comes from everywhere”

(Foucault, 1998, p. 63)

1.1 - Outline of Chapter 1

This chapter introduces the role that Foucauldian theory had on the rationale of why I chose to write a Master of Counselling thesis that explores the topic of self-care in the age of neoliberalism, how I am historically located within the work, and also a detailed discussion of what role I award the neoliberal construct in relation to self-care. I also link neoliberalism to my personal experience with burnout, my heritage, and the connection to the neoliberal political construct as an all-pervading ideology that seems to reside everywhere and informs everything. I deliberate on the social rigidity that has occurred because of neoliberalism and what influence this discourse has on people working in the mental health sectors. I introduce Harvey's outline of neoliberalism, followed by a discussion about neoliberalism as hegemonic discourse that exerts violence on various segments of societies. In the final section of Chapter 1 I explore the adverse influence of neoliberalism on clients and therapists by citing a range of sources and opinions, including the deteriorating work conditions in the mental health arena and the global impact of neoliberalism as an ideology. The last part comprises thoughts and opinions about identity formation and poses questions that I am asking myself when working as a counsellor under the spell of the neoliberal construct.

1.2 – Introduction

“Only the guy who isn’t rowing has time to rock the boat (Sartre, 1969, p.12).”

Numerous discourses, religious, political, and economic, have been used to achieve compliance from those who are ruled and many methods have been used to prevent the emancipation from such truth assertions, or to use Sartre’s metaphor – rock the boat. Over the past thirty years most western societies seem to be under the influence of a political discourse called neoliberalism, a form of unchecked capitalism. This discourse I believe can be linked to ongoing global conflicts, extreme social inequality, and environmental upheaval and furthermore it is also hindering self-care. Foucault described the care for the self as a revolutionary act. His writing in his final years expresses in many ways the estrangement of humankind from nature, spirituality, and meaning. He pointed out that the irrational pursuit of mindless materialism as a way of being is futile and an act against nature: “You may have killed God beneath the weight of all that you have said; but don’t imagine that, with all that you are saying, you will make a man that will live longer than he” (Foucault, 1972, p.232).

Foucault was concerned with power – knowledge relationships and how these operate in society through institutions that influence the masses, groups, and individuals. The analysis of power relations was the fundamental idea emerging from most of his earlier works. He was interested in the mechanisms of power that are exerted by the use of discourses, and how people may question these by creating independent identities to stand against the effects of power. He explained that it is not only institutions that assert power over the individual, but

that the individual, by internalising certain truth statements, becomes an agent for these powers, enacting control over self and others. Towards the end of his life, Foucault focused on the care of the self, reinstating ways to support the liberation of the subject suggesting methods that dated back to the philosophies of the Greek antiquity. Foucault (1994d) explained the liberation of the self from the grasp of power as follows:

The risk of dominating others and exercising a tyrannical power over them arises precisely only when one has not taken care of the self and has become the slave of one's desires. But if you take proper care of yourself, that is, if you know ontologically what you are, if you know what you are capable of, if you know what it means for you to be a citizen of a city... if you know what things you should and should not fear, if you know what you can reasonably hope for and, on the other hand, what things should not matter to you, if you know, finally, that you should not be afraid of death – if you know all this, you cannot abuse your power over others (p.288).

Foucault's writing is an invitation to become aware of power, not only what it does to a person but also what that person does with it. As part of becoming a citizen of a city, a person open to change I have chosen to see my identity as continuously emergent, wanting to recognize my limitations: my aim is not only to understand my agency but also my responsibility towards myself and others. I believe that I, and a great number of my clients, display symptoms of a sick society, rather than display an individual's failure to adjust to that society. As a counsellor I do not want to become an instrument of the current dominant neoliberal discourse, patching up my clients and sending them back into the fray. My aim is to equip

myself, and my clients, with what Foucault and others before him wanted to equip people with – a concern for the self that may lead to the end of the cycle of abuse of power. With that knowledge in mind I want to make self-care not just an act of defiance but also one of enlightenment. This is not just words in a thesis but to use a phrase that I learned from my time working in the prison system – I want to walk the talk.

1.3 – Why Explore Self-care in the Age of Neo-liberalism?

When I was first considering various ideas about the research for a master's thesis the safety brief of flight crews came to mind - In case of an emergency - oxygen masks will drop from the ceiling - first fasten your own mask before you attempt to assist others (Shallcross, 2011). This simple but essential instruction stresses the questions that inspired this thesis: Is it essential to look after my own needs to be able to assist others? Also, as a counsellor I am modelling behaviour for others and I need to ask: How realistic is it, wanting to support others, while I am unable to support myself and walk the talk? How can I give my clients the best possible support if I do not know how to look after myself? What have I learned from my past? Do I need to know about and how to prevent states such as burnout, vicarious traumatisation, and compassion fatigue? As a counsellor I want to be reflective and reflexive. I am required to question the way I work, act upon these realisations, and also maintain an ethical and sustainable approach in my practice. The New Zealand Association of Counsellors (NZAC) Code of Ethics (NZAC, 2012) states that:

Counsellors, together with their supervisors, shall monitor and maintain their fitness to practice at a level that enables them to provide an effective service

and shall withdraw from part or all of their counselling practice while their emotional, mental or physical health is significantly impaired (p.6)

Once I started to discuss this study with my family, friends, and colleagues I realised that just talking about self-care seemed to raise awareness of the issue and changed attitudes in others. This encouraged me to continue because I strongly believe that a study of self-care is an essential part of developing an identity as a counsellor and it also holds relevance to other professions that engage in the complexes of political and economic arrangements. This thesis is also inspired by my belief that I am living in a precarious time when humanity seems to have crossed the threshold of initiating the demise of the entire ecosystem driven by a dangerous ideology: neoliberalism. In other words, to use the analogy of the airline safety briefing, even if I fasten the oxygen mask to my own face first, it will not make any difference if the aeroplane is in free fall. Similarly, the flawed ideological engineering (neoliberalism) is sending humanity into oblivion (Jensen, 2006).

1.4 - Dominant Discourses and the Desire for Reflective Practice

When researching possible theoretical approaches for this thesis I discovered what Foucault (1988, p.2) refers to as “care of the self”. His writings inspired me to explore the past and unlearn things in order to access a different understanding—or truth—that was masked by the widely disseminated and dominant neoliberal constructs. Foucault (1987) argues for taking responsibility for what truths a person adheres to, creating what the ancient Greeks described as a method of self-governance. This process involves unlearning unwanted behaviours, driven by the dominant discourse, which leads to challenging the falsehood of liberty that neoliberal

governmentality and a politics of the self, proclaim (Curtis, 2007). Old beliefs that generated behaviours over years or decades and became part of my identity are now outdated. I want to shape an identity that is not determined by who I compete with, or what I own, or who I rule, but how to find an ethical way to interact with others. I am no longer seduced by the neoliberal constructs that convert countries political systems into “inverted totalitarianism” (Wolin, 2010), but rather, I want to strengthen local community efforts and engage in a balanced approach to work and life, shunting away the manic growth and bust cycles of the globalised market economies. To work towards my desire to become a reflexive practitioner I need to consider the past, and reflect, in order to conceptualise and to establish new ways of being (Dewey, 1933). I need to prise out long established truisms whilst clearly demarcating the discourses that I believe are responsible for unwanted behaviours. In Chapter 3.3 I outline in more detail the concept of reflective practice and how I envisage using this thesis to advance towards increasing a reflexive approach.

1.5 – Neoliberalism – My New Zealand Experience

When I came to New Zealand from Germany in the mid-1980s I thought that the country was an example of egalitarianism. The social, economic and political environment soon changed when the Labour Government, Minister of Finance, Sir Roger Douglas, introduced neoliberal policies. Competitiveness in form of targets was introduced to most institutions within the decade, utilising managerialism in an effort to socially engineer the free market ethos into the work arena, and that ethos eventually crept into all aspects of human interactions (Kelsey, 2015). Instead of lending a helping hand to the less fortunate, the growing underclass was

mocked for being poor in an effort that was christened, beneficiary bashing (Johnson & Salvation Army NZ, 2015). Now, after 30 years of neoliberalism, people from marginalised groups suffer under the pressure of being disenfranchised from society, with growing prison populations (Cavadino & Dignan, 2006 Wacquant, 2010) and rising homelessness (Johnson & Salvation Army NZ, 2015; Pratt & Clark, 2005; Wacquant, 2009; Leitner, et al., 2007).

Meanwhile financial austerity, as part of the neoliberal project, has stripped government institutions and contributed to a redistribution of formerly state owned assets into the hands of private investors. These so-called private, or partially, private enterprises periodically receive tax funded bailouts in case the privatisation effort fails (Chiang & Prescott, 2010). These changes are accompanied by mounting uncertainty in the globalised job markets and mounting private household debt leading to increase in poverty (Harvey, 2006; Johnson & Salvation Army NZ, 2015; Oxfam, 2016). The pressure on the vulnerable has increased the need for interventions by mental health workers who are under attack by managerial systems that oppress them, initiated to increase profitability, while diminishing valuable time from frontline tasks (Yeoman, 2012; Rashbrooke, 2013).

The languages of “outputs” and “outcomes” became integral within the public sector and intrinsic to how service providers conceptualised their activities, measured the value of these activities, and sought and accounted for state funding. It remains a governing doctrine today (Yeoman, 2012, p.99).

The underlying thinking is that workers are just another commodity. The former chairman of the Federal Reserve Bank, Phillip Greenspan, suggested that increasing worker insecurity is a substantial aspect in keeping inflation and inflation expectation low, protecting

long-term investment (Chomsky, 2011). He implies that people will work for less whilst not challenging work conditions because of constant fear of falling victim to a restructuring (Chomsky, 2011). Counsellors like others in the workforce, work in a system that is increasingly determined by numbers, not individual people. I believe that our political system is largely responsible for the level of burnout, compassion fatigue, and vicarious traumatisation that, in particular, those working in the education and health sectors experience. It seems to me that the workers have psychologically internalised the rise and crash cycle of the current neoliberal system that ignores their basic functioning as human beings, a system that emphasises short-term gains over ethical considerations (Jensen, 2006).

1.6 – Self-care as an Antidote

“Every age develops its own peculiar forms of pathology, which express in exaggerated form, its underlying character structure” (Lasch, 1991, p.41). Lasch’s assertion resonates with me because I believe that our pathology is driven by the hegemonic discourse – neoliberalism (the latest metamorphosis of capitalism), which is shaping our very character structure and identities. Neoliberalism is the all pervasive reference point through which, and against which, our desires are operating. My need to care for myself is constantly negotiated through this discourse, or it is hindered by it. For this reason, the political dimension of this study, and the main thrust of my critique, is aimed at the neoliberal discourse. I am openly revealing my opposition and resistance towards the tyranny of free-market policy which is in reality a corporate dictatorship (Wolin, 2010) and is a doctrine that has encroached on every aspect of human interaction (Giroux, 2004). I am aware of the mechanisms of control and dissemination

that have been acting upon me and this thesis is an act of resistance, and it is also an encouragement for the creation of alternatives. For instance, I refuse to believe in the doctrine of economic growth, or in the need of a political system with the sole purpose to keep markets functioning. Neoliberalism has become a hegemonic discourse because the construction of meaning is in the hand of individuals and groups with differing access to power that creates social realities (Foucault, 1991a). I have elevated self-care to my preferred social action, so that in Foucault's terms it is the dominant discourse that determines both public and private life (Foucault, 1991a). As a consequence I will speak out about the obscenity that 65 individuals own as much as the less affluent half of the population on the planet (Goldsmith & Mander, 2014; Oxfam, 2016). Furthermore these same few wealthy people also control the media and political processes and are therefore able to disseminate the dominant discourses and manipulate social interactions through propaganda (Herman & Chomsky, 2010; Wolin, 2010; Orwell, 1936). I resist the consensus achieved through various mechanisms of influence that shape social interaction (Burr, 2003).

1.7 – Neoliberalism – Definition of a Dominant Discourse

“Our findings show that modern-day ‘Thatcherism’ has made us fat, stressed, insecure and ill. These neoliberal policies are dominating the globe and they are often presented as our only option but they have devastating effects on our health” (Schrecker & Bambra, 2015, p.6). It seems insane that societies in growing numbers on the planet are stuck with the neoliberal doctrine that makes them mentally and physically unwell as Bambra and Schrecker claim. New discourses in a market driven health sector are labelled diseases of affluence (World Health

Organization, 2011) that attempt to describe the psychological and physiological repercussions of consumerism and stress. At times I become disillusioned by the general feeling of helplessness that neoliberalism causes me in my sphere of influence, as chimera like, it mutates, void of any ethical consideration to exploit the very diseases that are a direct result of its existence (Schlosser, 2012; Goldsmith & Mander, 2001). It is not surprising that it is a discourse that is intentionally not very clearly demarcated by those who employ its tenets (Giroux, 2004).

The term neoliberalism has, in contemporary academic literature, various definitions. For this thesis I use Harvey's definition as elaborated in his 2005 Brief History of Neoliberalism. There he gives the concept a wide-ranging definition:

Neoliberalism is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices. The state has to guarantee, for example, the quality and integrity of money. It must also set up those military, defence, police and legal structures and functions required to secure private property rights and to guarantee, by force if need be, the proper functioning of markets. Furthermore, if markets do not exist (in areas such as land, water, education, health care, social security, or environmental pollution) then they must be created, by state action if necessary. But beyond these tasks the state should not venture. State

interventions in markets (once created) must be kept to a bare minimum because, according to the theory, the state cannot possibly possess enough information to second-guess market signals (prices) and because powerful interest groups will inevitably distort and bias state interventions (particularly in democracies) for their own benefit (p.2).

Harvey outlines the characteristics of neoliberalism as a societal and global decree that is based on the importance of corporate power, laissez-faire markets and the rejection of public services. However, as information about income inequality suggests the neoliberal claim that economies following the prescription would perform more efficiently, create greater wealth and economic prosperity for all is erroneous (Oxfam, 2016). The idea that markets if permitted to perform their functions without government intervention would create a marvellous utopia has rather proven to be a dystopia (Jensen, 2006).

1.8 – Neoliberalism – Conceived in a Violent Past Creating a Violent Future

Historically the occurrence of neoliberalism can be understood as a certain form of angst that emerged out of the uneasiness born of the wake of the Second World War, when fascist Germany and other repressive totalitarian countries crushed personal liberty and unleashed extreme atrocities (Mirowski & Plehwe 2008).

Neoliberalism is a context in which the establishment, maintenance, and extension of hierarchical orderings of social relations are re-created, sustained, and intensified, where processes of “othering” loom large. Accordingly, neoliberalization should be regarded as integral to violence inasmuch as it

generates social divisions within and across space. Yet the world as we see it today where the violence of neoliberalism proceeds with a careless lack of restraint is neither necessary nor inevitable (Springer, 2012, p.12).

Springer (2012) suggests that the connection between neoliberalism and violence is an immediate part of the structures of diktats that neoliberalism creates, validates, and guards in advancing its hegemonies of ideology, of dogma and platform, of nationality, of subjectification, and eventually of discourse. Similarly Wolin (2010) describes the function of the state under the neoliberal doctrine as the enabler for the functioning of the markets at any cost. The functioning of the markets is, however, merely a redistribution carrousel, that shifts wealth from the lower classes and public ownership into the hands of a few who are controlling the state and the media, resulting in the descent of most Western Nations into a form of government that Wolin (2010) called – inverted totalitarianism – a dictatorship of vested interests that simulates democratic processes.

1.9 - Influences of the Neoliberal Discourse on my Practice and Self-care

Neoliberalism doesn't entail the reduction of government interventions but a change in the nature and character of those interferences, leading to massive changes in class (and race and gender) power relations in most affected nations...This is the source of the vast health disparities on the globe nowadays (Navarro, 2009, p.423).

Navarro (2009) points out that neoliberalism is not just an economic programme, it reaches far beyond into all aspects of societies around the world, including systemic

inequalities in health care. Neoliberalism is a construct that aims to achieve societal advancement through unharnessed selfishness in an attempt to reach an elusive social equilibrium (Curtis, 2007). The neoliberal system of belief ignores humanity's greatest virtues – compassion and cooperation and then reduces them to a sequence of calculated moves that aim at outdoing a hostile competitor (Curtis, 2007). Institutionalised selfishness contradicts how I work as counsellor, who relies mainly on these same essential tools - compassion and cooperation, ideally building an alliance with clients that is based on trust.

Here I consider some of the influences the discourse neoliberalism has on my level and ability to maintain self-care in the work environment and in the broader societal context. The overall range of influence is beyond the scope of this study and therefore I have included only the aspects that have importance in relation to the auto-ethnographic part in chapter 5.

a) The exposure of clients and therapists to adverse neoliberal policies:

As a therapist I am confronted daily with the consequences of the free-market doctrine Norcross and Guy (2007) describe this situation as follows:

“Even as we write this chapter, we are painfully aware that our message runs counter to the zeitgeist of the industrialization of mental health care. Managed care devalues the individuality of the practitioner, preferring instead to speak of “providers” on “panels.” The pervasive medical model prefers manualized treatments for DSM diagnoses [Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders] to therapeutic relationships with unique humans (p.4).”

The free-market policies adapted for therapeutic care has led to the reduction in institutionalisation of mental health patients (because of funding cuts) on the basis that they may integrate in the mainstream community with the aim that they will get the help they need

there. The reality is that now, community mental health agencies are given the responsibility of caring for high-need patients, but without adequate funding, and this can lead to burnout amongst therapists (Lloyd & King, 2004). In addition, therapists employed in these agencies face a rise in administrative duties that leads often to an inadvertent move away from important clinical work and a consequent reduction in obtainable resources (Yeoman, 2012). This dilemma has caused emotional exhaustion for numerous therapists and counsellors (Lloyd & King, 2004; Yeoman, 2012). Pryce et al. (2007) found that numerous people, working in various helping professions, recognised the demands of their agencies as the highest barrier to their efficiency and their work satisfaction. There is a direct link between neoliberal social policies and an increase in social and health/mental health issues (Bitler & Hoynes, 2008, Bryson, Warner-Smith; Brown & Fray, 2007; Schrecker & Bamba, 2015).

b) A failed global political system - Stress caused by environmental devastation:

We are all socially interdependent and construct our society as a collective effort (Burr, 2003). We share the same bio-sphere with limited resources, a reality that is not non-negotiable (Foster, 2009). As Durán (2012) writes:

We are approaching a unique moment in the history of humanity when our very survival is at stake... A global crisis, created by an unfair and brutal system, based on extreme competition and social and inter- [racial and] sexual inequality, with no consideration for the limits of resources...of the biosphere, is something that cannot be wished away (p.107).

Neoliberalism undermines self-care because it is an unfair and brutal system causing environmental devastation (Jensen, 2006). It is a flawed global economic and social order that

increasingly exhibits a fatal contradiction between reality and reason—to the point, in our time, where it threatens not only human welfare but also the continuation of most sentient forms of life on the planet (Foster, 2009).

c) Deteriorating work conditions

Although most publications and articles that I read on self-care suggest that professionals should use various measures to improve the situation only few make the link to dominant political discourses. Such exceptions include Andrew and Krupka (2012) and Yeoman (2012) who argue for the therapist to question the rationale of structures that impair the therapist and their ability to maintain a reasonable level of self-care whilst working in the mental health care arena:

In order to maintain a degree of sanity and to protect ourselves from the dangerous illusion of self-blame, we need to wrestle with the social construction of our predicament. Continuing to embrace the madness that we can each find our own healthy path through economic rationalism only serves to strengthen a system that is harming us (Andrew & Krupka, 2012, p.46).

The current rationale of austerity and the disintegration of worker's rights solicited by neoliberal politics, has led to the "McDonaldization" (Ritzer, 1996) of an increasing number of work environments. For example, the way the concept of labour was perceived in the 1970s, at the height of the power of the labour movement and unionism, is very different under the current climate of neoliberal denigration of the institution of labour (Harvey, 2006). In the 1970s people fought for shortening work time to increase quality of life for the workers with the 40 hour working week getting introduced in most OECD countries (Harvey, 2006). Today

people fear losing their employment because of transfer of production to an off-shore location and cheap non-unionised labour, constant restructuring, or weakened employment laws (Harvey, 2006). The massive ideological propaganda of the proponents of neoliberalism exchanged the state bureaucracy with managerialism and empowered companies to create national and international competition in the labour market (Harvey, 2006). The “social action” (Burr, 2003) that has emerged now is very different from the 1970s. Employees work for less remuneration and to create more value for the company, or institution, whilst being quiet about worker’s rights because of reduced job security (Waquant, 2010; Harvey, 2006). Precarious work undermines self-care with workers shying away from taking breaks out of fear of being labelled a slacker and it also causes notorious under staffing and work overload (Wilson, 2014).

Over the past decades a 24/7 mode of business has been established and this coincides with the rise of the Internet (Bittman & Rice, 2002). In the long term these developments lead to professionals believing they need to place the organisational targets and the needs of others before themselves, and to denigrate the belief that they are worthy of consideration or self-care. Kerr (2013) indicates that participants in her research do not think it normal to place an emphasis on the self but rather only to see other workplace actors worthy to be cared for.

d) Disaster capitalism and continuous war to maintain the markets

Klein in *Shock Doctrine* (2007) describes the strategies of the main theoretical masterminds of the neoliberal discourse Milton Friedman and Friederich von Hayek. Klein accuses Friedman and von Hayek of deliberate schemes to introduce neoliberal policies by exploiting or even creating crisis situations through the use of covert agents who would incite or wage wars or

utilise natural disasters). Similar claims are made by Chomsky (1999, 2004), who describes the USA government's hegemonic ambitions by creating a continuous state of war in various countries in recent decades, to sustain the US military-industrial complex. However, colonisation through neoliberalism is waged far beyond the battlefields; it is a war against self-sufficient communities per se, in an attempt to homogenise the world into a globalist corporate entity (Jensen, 2006; Klein, 2007; Chomsky, 1999). Hitler called it *Gleichschaltung* a procedure by which the Nazis successively introduced their version of totalitarianism. Similarly, neoliberal social engineers have a practical reason to destroy cultural identity or wholesome communities: it is easier to control and sell goods to homogenised societies, exploit people for cheap labour and reap obscene profits (Schlosser, 2012; Harvey, 2005; Goldsmith & Mander, 2001). The neoliberal ideal is that every aspect of culture, nature, and existence needs to be commodified and public ownership and what cannot be transformed into profits needs to be destroyed (Jensen, 2006). In Chapter 5, I discuss in greater detail the link between disaster capitalism and the homogenising of societies when I address my own history as the child of survivors of the Second World War. The above mentioned influences of neoliberal policies have direct implications for my level of self-care. Because I encounter systemic social problems in my work that are largely beyond my control I frequently experience a sense of helplessness that may lead to burnout.

1.10 - Hegemonic Discourses and the Forming of the Neoliberal Self

It is not a sign of health to be well adjusted to a sick society. (Krishnamurti, 1985). For me the sickness that Krishnamurti alludes to is the neoliberal discourse. I see this discourse as

an all-permeating sickness that chokes the majority of people who find themselves under its spell. It is a discourse that offers the illusion of freedom whilst dishing out death and destruction on a global scale (Klein, 2007). People are embedded in social environments that dictate how they operate and what they may perceive as their identity. How I exercise self-care is interrelated to the forming of identity. This process is influenced and in constant exchange with the dominant discourses. On par with most OECD members, New Zealand's only current political and economic doctrine is capitalism/neoliberalism (Kelsey, 2015) and the preferred state of self fits into this construct, or is produced by it. Harvey (2005) contends that neoliberalism is not just economic strategy and politics, but rather it determines the meaning of everyday life for the individual: "Neoliberalism has, in short, become hegemonic as a mode of discourse... inclusive of its pervasive effects (p.3)." McGuigan (2014) remarks that individuals have a choice in how far they let this hegemonic discourse take over in an "ideological battle [for their] hearts and minds... by influencing the very language that is used mundanely" (p.225). If neoliberalism influences the way people think and act it is logical that it has somehow an impact on self-care. In most societies the spectrum of how people define the self in self-care and wellbeing will range widely. It may vary from the committed workaholics who advance the current neoliberal discourse to the individuals who thrive on the opposite. Some people aware, or unaware, may oppose the machinery of consumerism and mindless competition by living a life that may be described variously as fringe, radical, or anti-social.

1.11 – Working as a Therapist with the Neoliberal Self

I need to question myself, where do I fit on the continuum? To what extent am I colluding in maintaining the status quo by adapting the current neoliberal discourse? What areas of my identity are affected by this discourse and how do I construct alternatives that incorporate self-care? As a therapist I want to be aware of my ethical stance when disseminating my discourses that may be influencing my clients. By supporting my clients to function I support them to re-immense into the societal constructs that I believe to be the cause of their un-wellness in the first place. I want to be accountable, belonging to what Rose (1999) labelled the “psy sciences” (p. viii) that “fabricate subjects capable of bearing the burdens of liberty” enshrining the emerging possible identities in the distorted values of autonomy, freedom, and choice (Reith, 2004). As a therapist I may co-construct identity however my aim is not to create suitable subjects for the dominant discourses. Instead I want to create awareness of the neoliberal project and offer alternatives by supporting clients to recognise their power to reshape their discourse. I want to empower my clients to avoid chasing an unattainable mirage of personal fulfilment through fitting into the confines the neoliberal discourse. I am also aware, however, that I need to accept my client’s adherence to any discourse that they deem suitable to their sense of wellbeing even if it doesn’t conform to my views.

Chapter 2: Review of Relevant Literature

2.1- Introduction to Literature Review

Even one of the best known professionals in the counselling arena admitted that he struggled with looking after his own needs. “I have always been better at caring for and looking after others than I have in caring for myself” (Rogers, 1995, p. 80). Rogers’s admission is sobering but reminds me that it is a constant challenge to care for the self. This review of literature accentuates this notion. There is no one-size-fits-all approach for self-care to conceptualise what the various pitfalls are when it is not present. I point out why it is important to have an understanding of wellbeing in relation to self-care whilst considering differing cultures, eras, or situations. I explore the conundrum of being perceptive and empathetic while being exposed to intense emotional encounters. This is followed by thoughts and sources about the interrelationship between the importance of the client and counsellor relationship and the importance of self-care in the counselling setting. The middle part of the literature review deals with consequences of missing self-care, and its various pathologies, in an attempt to gain an overall understanding of the subject. This is followed by a discussion of the ethical considerations in regard to the responsibilities towards my clients and the counselling profession to uphold a reasonable level of self-care and safety. I introduce Norcross’s (2000) “clinician recommended, research informed, and practitioner tested” (p. 712) suggestions for effective self-care and my preferred holistic model, based Durie’s Te Whare Tapa Wha concept (Durie, 1994). This is followed by a debate about the relationship between my commitments to advocacy as a component of the Code of Ethics for practising counsellors in New Zealand. The

chapter concludes with a discussion about the absurdities of missing self-care, giving some examples of how the current political climate is contradicting wellbeing.

2.2- Self-care Matters

This literature review explores various concepts in relation to self-care, comprising material that is both structuralist and poststructuralist in origin. Aspects of self-care are complex because a counsellor's level of self-care influences colleagues, clients, as well as the therapist. Research suggests that a lack of self-care or dissatisfaction at work for nurses, physicians, social workers, and counsellors has a direct influence on the quality of care they can offer (DeVoe, et al., 2002; Poghosyan, et al., 2010; Soderfeldt, et al., 1995; Stevanovic & Rupert, 2004). Lack of caring about body, mind and soul can cause chronic stress that can lead to or deteriorate complaints and illnesses such as cardiovascular disease, anxiety disorders, depression, hypertension, substance abuse, some cancers, gastrointestinal disorders, and morbid obesity (Brennan & Moos, 1990; Levy, et al., 1997; Shapiro & Goldstein, 1982; Treiber et al., 1993; Whitehead, 1992, as quoted in Schure, et al., 2008). Work related stress has an impact on absenteeism levels and professionalism, efficacy, and contentment at work (Burnard, et al., 2000). It is not a secret that self-care matters, however the reality of how practitioners conduct self-care is not reflecting this fact and more attention is needed (Barnett, et al., 2007).

2.3- Self-care is Relative

Concepts such as self-care or wellbeing are relative and depend on a person's individual preferences and it is questionable to formulate a universal prescription for self-care. "Life is not

a uniform game with identical rules for all” write Norcross and Guy in their guide to psychotherapist self-care, suggestively named, *Leaving It at the Office* (2007, xiv). Self-care is an intricate matter because it encompasses the therapist’s unique characteristics, the work and private environment, and levels of exposure to trauma and stress in the workplace (Stamm, 1997). People can be located on a continuum of functionality/dysfunctionality, content/discontent, healthy/unhealthy and so forth, where the individual converges with the environment (Crisp, Taylor, Douglas, & Rebeiro, 2005). Deficiencies or functional self-care are a combination of individual and environmental influences. Norcross and Guy (2007) capture the complexities of the various perspectives focusing on individual as opposed to collective causes of the functioning or deficits in self-care as:

The self-care and burnout fields have been polarized into rival camps. One camp focuses on the individual’s deficits—the “fault, dear Brutus, is in ourselves” advocates—and correspondingly recommends individualistic solutions to self-care; a second camp focuses on the systemic and organizational pressures—the “impossible profession with inhumane demands” advocates—and naturally recommends environmental and social solutions (p. 4).

I believe that the social influences have significant sway over a person’s behaviour. The political and economic conditions have an immediate impact on the way self-care plays out in the workplace and therefore a range of causes, such as high levels of stress, are to a lesser degree in the individual’s scopes of influence. Naturally there is a vast range of methods to improve self-care; however, there are also approaches that are problematic, such as smoking breaks, excessive exercise, or overeating. Foucault (1991) suggests that societal norms are determined

by widely disseminated discourses or regimes of truth. To what degree the individual is free to choose or is conditioned to adapt a particular discourse is hard to determine. The merging between environment and the individual choosing at any given moment to think or behave in a certain way makes it impossible to define exactly what impact the environment or individual choice has. I acknowledge that it is important to recognise that it is the interdependence of the person and the environment that determines effective self-care, it is up to the individual to use the parts that fit into their own conceptions of self-care.

2.4- Concepts of Wellbeing

To be able to notice or change states of un-wellness it is important to explore what state of wellbeing is preferable, and have constructs available that describe a desired different state. The word is used in contemporary language with the assumption that everyone has the same concept in mind; however, Kelly (2006) and Sarason (2000) assert the subjective nature of the term *wellness* and that it is complex to come up with an all-encompassing explanation. The World Health Organisation (WHO, 2002, xii) explained the term as "a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity." Although the meaning of the word complete is unclear, many researchers adopt this principle that wellness is not just the absence of disease or suffering, but include other concepts (see, for example, Adams et al., 1997). A comprehensive holistic model is the Myers and Sweeney Wheel of Wellness (2007), which consists of twelve parts: sense of worth, sense of control, realistic beliefs, emotional awareness and coping, problem solving and creativity, sense of humour, nutrition, exercise, self-care, stress management, gender identity, and cultural identity. Other

comprehensive models have been compiled and reviewed by Roscoe (2009) and include the following domains: social, emotional, physical, intellectual, spiritual, psychological, occupational, and environmental. Roscoe stresses the importance of using wellness models and particular measuring tools to enable the collection of data for use in therapeutic work. She concludes that:

Use of better wellness assessments will assist in further exploring and confirming the structure of wellness. The increased activity and focus will strengthen wellness as central to counselling and foster increased attention on the emphasis on optimal functioning as opposed to illness and the medical model (2009, p. 225).

It is important, however, to regard the changing societal and cultural situations in any model of wellness. Any model of wellness needs to be considered as an interpretation of wellness to avoid the model becoming a tool to create just another hegemonic discourse. It is important to fit a model around the person instead of fitting the person into the model (in particular, multicultural considerations would be vital). Because of societies tendency to experience reality by determining binaries (Rogan & LeDoux, 1996) a comparison of wellness and un-wellness helps to demarcate the two concepts. However wellness and un-wellness describes states, that are open to interpretation, they exist on a continuum and are subject to constant change and influences.

2.5- The Therapeutic Relationship and Self-care

Norcross and Guy (2007) suggest that psychotherapists choose to work in the field to mitigate suffering and support clients to create the desired change, ideally leading to increased wellness. Research investigating the effectiveness of psychotherapy estimates that the therapeutic relationship, including empathy, collaboration, and the working alliance, accounts up to 38 % of the psychotherapy outcome (Lambert et al., 1996; Norcross, 2002; Duncan & Miller, 2004). It is part of my job description to regard my clients with consideration and respect. I have consciously chosen to care about my clients when, for instance, empathising with their concerns; however, I am also influenced by the suffering that I observe and experience when dealing with their traumas. Because of this stance or predisposition I am also sensitive about discourses that I perceive as harmful for my clients and the world we share. The direct influence of the neoliberal discourse may cause burnout when I am continuously exposed to secondary trauma that may be induced by witnessing my clients experiencing social injustices. This transpires “more intense for those who are by nature and inclination, emotionally attuned to others” (Skovholt, & Trotter-Mathison, 2014, p.3). I am aware that my concern for a client is vital because it influences the relationship in the therapeutic setting. Upholding professional distance may not prevent the effects on me of intense emotional sessions and I might experience through witnessing and engaging trauma and emotional pain. Even if I guard myself against getting too involved, it is only if I have the strength to regain my equilibrium (dependent on effective self-care) that I will be able to continue to function for other clients.

2.6- Consequences of Missing Self-care

Counsellors are no less likely than any other person to live with the effects of daily stresses or physical or mental health issues; they are human and therefore not immune to the harsh realities of this existence (Skovholt & Starkey, 2010). Therapists struggle with substance abuse and behavioural addictions despite a common perception that education and training renders them immune to these problems (Barnett, et al., 2007). Most therapists are in fact at even greater risk of burnout than those who are not working as mental health workers (Sherman, 1996). However when counsellors are gasping for air they cannot help others, and need to look after their psychological and spiritual needs or will in the end run out of breath resulting in not being able to practice effectively (Shallcross, 2011). Initial warning signs of inadequate self-care may show as absentmindedness and minor negligence, where more severe signs of possible insufficient self-care are moodiness, emotional weariness, chronic fatigue, feelings of isolation, angst, depression, and recurrent headaches (Skovholt, 2001). Every individual regardless of their occupation has to take stock of their own needs and work out an approach that works for them. The focus of this research, however, covers in particular the counselling domain that fits into the context of this study to emphasise where self-care deficiencies and strength are located, whilst acknowledging that there are countless others.

2.6 i - Consequences of missing self-care - compassion fatigue/ secondary traumatic stress.

Compassion fatigue is a term that describes a state in which a therapist who supports clients, who have suffered trauma, becomes desensitised through re-experiencing these

traumas over a prolonged time period (Beck, 2011). My own brush with secondary traumatic stress occurred when I was working with several clients in a prison. It led to periods of numbness and shutting out emotions, a state that Figley describes as: “a state of tension and preoccupation with the traumatized patients by re-experiencing the traumatic events, avoidance/numbing of bearing witness to the suffering of others” (2002, p.143). He proposes that counsellors who work with clients who have lived through traumatic experiences are exposed to explicit work related risks to their wellbeing: “there is a cost to caring...the most effective therapists are most vulnerable to this contagion effect...those who have enormous capacity for feeling and expressing empathy tend to be more at risk of compassion stress” (Figley, 1995, p.1). People who suffer prolonged STS can present with a number of symptoms such as the belief that everything is getting worse, a lack in experiences of pleasure, continuing tension and anxiety, insomnia and bad dreams, and a persistent negative attitude (Beck, 2011). Continuing exposure to the source of the stressors, lack of support, or failure to recognise the need of help, can have professional and personal repercussions, such as a decline in productivity, not being able to concentrate, and growing concerns about being competent and uncertainty (Culver, et al., 2011). The risk for compassion fatigue is often not considered in training programmes for professionals, and as counsellors we should endeavour to practice for *ourselves* what we encourage our clients to do for *themselves* (Baruch, 2004).

2.6 ii - Consequences of missing self-care - vicarious traumatising.

Clinicians who work with the sufferers of violence and other traumatic events need to be aware that they may develop a state that has been termed both vicarious traumatising,

and also secondary victimisation (Figley, 1995; Pearlman & Saakvitne, 1995, Saakvitne, et al., 2000). Vicarious traumatisation is unlike compassion fatigue or burnout and is described as “profound psychological effects, effects that can be disruptive and painful for the helper and can persist for months or years after work with [a] traumatized person” (McCann & Perlmann 1990, p.133 as quoted in Campbell, 2008).

2.6 iii - Consequences of missing self-care – burnout.

My own experience with burnout has, in part, provided the inspiration to explore self-care as the topic for this study. I acknowledge that the environment is not solely responsible for people burning out. In my case a combination of factors were responsible, for instance a predisposition towards using work as a coping mechanism. As with most descriptions of mental states they can only capture a small proportion of the complexities that influence outcomes, there are differences from person to person, and are also situation to situation. The horrific sounding metaphor of burnout evokes thoughts of immediate danger for the practitioner when “in fact, the term ‘rust-out’ might be more appropriate, because a professional doesn’t usually flame out all at once, in a single moment, but rather slowly loses interest in work and begins to exhibit the same or similar symptoms as those of his or her clients” (Kottler, 2011, p. 143). It is a “process, not an event,” that has influence on a person’s welfare in a multitude of areas such as physical, psychological, behavioural, professional, and interpersonal (Salston & Figley, 2003). Burnout can occur as a result of pressure experienced over time that is not sufficiently resolved (Freudenberger, 1990) and will lead ultimately to “the terminal phase of therapist distress” accompanied by emotional numbness, overtiredness, absence of motivation and indifference

(Baker, 2003, p.21). Burnout is often linked to long lasting work related stress but is not necessarily experienced due to working with traumatised clients; it can be caused by institutional problems (Pryce et al., 2007). Maslach writes that burnout has three levels for therapists: emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation of clients, and a reduced sense of personal accomplishment at work (1986). An increasing amount of research supports the view that symptoms of burnout are similar to depression (Ahola, et al., 2014). The repercussions of burnout include, upsetting the therapist personally, professionally, and physically (Valente & Marotta, 2005). Counsellors need to understand that the key to avoiding burnout is based on implementing a professional attitude where self-care is treated as a virtuous foundation of being (Gilroy, Carroll, & Murra, 2002).

2.7- The concept of Work Addiction

Huxley writes in *Point counters Point* that his protagonists intoxicate themselves with work so they will not see how they really are (Huxley, 1947, xvii). Huxley wrote this 70 years ago describing what he witnessed in society then but it seems to me as valid today as it might have been for him then. I also used work to avoid looking at myself and how or who I was. It is an accepted process of self-abuse and mistreatment of others in a world that puts profits and work before all other needs. It is an obsession or addiction that may also largely be caused by the construct of capitalism that Huxley brilliantly describes in the dystopia *Brave New World* (1932). Like most constructs of addiction, work-addiction is difficult to generalise and needs to be considered on a case by case basis, exploring the unique situation of the person in question (Reinarman, 2005). Reinarman (2005) emphasises that there are positive and negative aspects

to this behaviour: for instance a person who is addicted to work may accumulate a great deal of money or be liked by their superiors. Based on my own experience I would describe it as the opposite of self-care where work and busyness become the sole focus of being. Just like some alcoholics, some work addicts engage in bingeing sessions for days or weeks working on a project until exhausted, only to repeat the behaviour when slightly recovered. In many cases work addiction leads to burnout and has adverse effects, not only on the addict, but also for co-workers and family members (Andreassen, et al., 2007).

Workaholics create stress and burnout for themselves and for their fellow workers, creating negative fallout in the form of low morale, disharmony, interpersonal conflict, lower productivity, absenteeism and tardiness due to stress related illnesses, loss of creativity, and lack of team cooperation. Work addiction, therefore, is not a positive quality (Robinson, 2007 p. 46).

There are no exact statistics available but estimates by research suggest that 25% of the North American population can be considered work-addicted (Robinson, 2007) but Robinson (2007) suggests “sadly, in the twenty-first century work addiction has become so pervasive that many of us don’t see the condition or realize how serious it really is. Many clinicians—vast numbers of whom are also workaholics—still do not recognize workaholism as a problem” (p.7). Being addicted to work is pervasive, socially acceptable, and highly attractive to an organisation which benefits from the professionals who are imprisoned in at their work places by invisible restraints, increasing the dividend for the shareholders. It is the perfect addiction fitting perfectly into the neoliberal construct of working hard and consuming much without questioning the overall consequences (Alexander, 2008). Work conditions that demand

inhumane input are especially visible in the health care industry and in the helping professions, where the human element is eclipsed by the details of the workload (Fassel & Schaef, 1991). Studies assert that work addiction has strong adverse consequences, comprising depression, anxiety, anger, perfectionism, job stress, inability to delegate, and health complaints (Fassel, 1990; Haymon, 1993). Beyond personal issues such as psychological predisposition, modelling by significant others (Robinson, 2007) work addiction is the ideal fit for the free market economy. The conception of neoliberal policies combined with technological changes in our work environments made the notion of a private sphere evaporate. A study by Hewett and Luce (2006) revealed that 62% of high-achieving individuals work more than 50 hours a week, 35% work more than 60 hours a week, and 10% work more than 80 hours a week. The phrase *9 to 5* has been superseded by the new millennium slogan *24/7* and professionals (including counsellors), nowadays can and will work any hour of the day or night at home, in a motel, or wherever an electronic device is available (Kakabadse, et al., 2009). In Chapter 5 I discuss how, in my case, work addiction was linked to dissociation from unresolved feelings and used to relieve fears and anxieties through a false sense of control.

2.8- Self-care and Ethical Considerations

The idea that counsellors can harm their clients and, by not being aware of, and attending to, their own needs has inspired this research. It is clear that the pursuit of psychological wellness through ongoing self-care efforts has been described as an ethical imperative (Barnett et al., 2006). I am fully aware that if I am not fully functional, I may not be of much use to my clients; however, a far worse scenario would be if I am compromised to a

level that causes distress on an ongoing basis, resulting in serious harm to the client and myself.

The NZAC Code of Ethics states:

Counsellors, together with their supervisors, shall monitor and maintain their fitness to practice at a level that enables them to provide an effective service and shall withdraw from part or all of their counselling practice while their emotional, mental or physical health is significantly impaired (NZAC, 2012).

Following these requirements of the NZAC Code of Ethics is, of course, a sensible course of action when such problems arise, but the main goal should be the prevention of such situations occurring. For counsellors, self-care is an essential prerequisite for client care. In other words, self-care is not simply a personal matter but also an ethical necessity, and a moral imperative (Barnett, Johnston, & Hillard, 2006; Carroll, Gilroy, & Murra, 1999 as quoted in Norcross & Guy, 2007). Counsellors need to build awareness of the potential influence of their own physical and mental health on their capability to support those with whom they work and also to engage in ongoing efforts to minimise the impact of these factors on their clinical competence and professional functioning (Barnett, et al., 2007).

2.9 - Methods to Establish or Maintain Self-care

If you want to awaken all of humanity, then awaken all of yourself. If you want to eliminate the suffering in the world, then eliminate all that is dark and negative in yourself. Truly, the greatest gift you have to give is that of your own self-transformation (Lao Tzu, as quoted by Kahn, 2015).

As Lao Tzu points out working on oneself can have positive effects on others. In the counselling arena there are indications that counsellors are at least taking notice of the significance of taking care of their own needs to be able to stay healthy, work effectively and enjoy a good quality of life (Barnett, Johnston, & Hillard, 2005; Bassett and Lloyd, 2001; Carroll, Gilroy, & Murra, 1999; Daw and Joseph, 2007; Persius et. al., 2007; Ungar, Mackey, Guest, & Bernard, 2000 as quoted in Miner, 2010).

The following condensed bullet points are based on self-care suggestions by Norcross (2000) that are “clinician recommended, research informed, and practitioner tested” (p. 712).

1. It is essential to identify the risks of therapeutic practice whilst remaining realistic about outcomes.
2. Have strategies for self-care instead of thinking about detailed techniques
3. Increase self-awareness/ self-liberation to further workable self-care
4. Be open to give varieties of self-care a trial
5. Focus on enjoyable activities and a reduction of unsatisfactory ones
6. Be vulnerable, finding support in companionship through interest and peer support, family, caring relationships and supervision
7. Consider the advantages of personal therapy as a means of self-care
8. Avoid wishful thinking and self-blame
9. Find other professional engagements that are not related to therapeutic work
10. Have gratitude for the rewards that work as a therapist [counsellor] grants. (Norcross, 2000)

2.9 i - Methods to establish or to maintain self-care – Te Whare Tapa Wha.

Although I endorse Norcross's findings, I prefer the Māori model of Health, *Te Whare Tapa Wha*, because it is a holistic approach, not looking at self-care in a compartmentalised fashion but at all aspects of a person's needs. Durie (2001) suggests that although this well-established model uses the Māori perspective it can be adapted to any identity. Te Whare Tapa Wha is used in a number of applications such as health and education, the model likens wellbeing to the four walls of a house (whare) with each one of an essential part to guarantee the integrity of the interconnected structure (Durie, 1994): taha wairua - spiritual health, taha hinengaro - mental and emotional health, taha tinana – physical health, and taha whānau – family health. From a Māori perspective the spiritual part of the structure is the most important component for health (Durie, 1998). In regards to self-care I also see spiritual health as the foundation because it is akin to the *becoming aware* that Foucault describes as “knowing one's self” (Foucault, 1994b). I can also associate it with how I perceive myself fitting into the world that I experience. It speaks of self-development through spiritual awareness, and explores relationships with the environment, between people, and with their history. The breakdown of the relationship between spirituality (awareness) leads to absence of identity and seen as the source of ill health (Durie, 1998). The model identifies psychological health as the capacity to communicate, to think, and to feel in relation to others and self (Durie, 1998). The family health dimension encompasses all issues involving family wellbeing and for Māori, includes wider connections to the community rather than solely a focus on immediate family. The physical health component is the capability to achieve and maintain biological health and development and is closest to the Western perspective of health care (Durie, 1998). The difference, however,

from a Māori perspective, is that the various parts of a person's or a group's wellbeing is not compartmentalised, all components the physical, spiritual, psychological, and family are interwoven. This contradicts neoliberalism and capitalism because it embraces community welfare over individualistic goals such as primitive accumulation (Perelman, 2000) and for this reason it fits with my worldview and my spiritual aspirations. Finding a model that fits for a person who is seeking to improve their self-care is a unique task and I invite the reader to look for a framework that meets their specific needs.

2.10- The Challenge of Advocacy in the Face of Market Driven Politics

As a counsellor I have to work with societal complexities that come in my interactions with my clients. "Counsellors shall promote social justice through advocacy and empowerment" (Code of Ethics, NZAC, 2009, p.4). When dealing with people I cannot ignore societal influences and part of my ethical commitment includes advocacy. Advocacy involves dealing with various agencies and organisations in the hope to improve the social situation for my clients. Neoliberal measures introduced the rolling back of tax funded support for the vulnerable, Non – Government Organisations were founded to create profitable entities that directed funds into the hands of private stakeholders (Kelsey, 1993). Dew and Kirkman (2002) argue that the way in which long established institutions were broken up in New Zealand was flawed, without foresight and transpired erratically. "The New Zealand experience also offers a useful case study into the dramatic effects of neo-liberalism, their failure and a subsequent attempt to refocus mental health care on a more socially constructed basis" (Pavagada & DeSouza, 2012, p.259). Most counsellors are also liable to organisations referring clients to other forms of

therapy, remunerate other professionals, institute and impose standards of professional conduct that assess the effectiveness of counselling interventions. The increased application of capitalist mentality within the counselling setting leads to higher stress levels for a number of counsellors who need to balance their ethical consideration with the increasing demands to create measurable results that comply with the free market doctrine (Yeoman, 2012). This occurs whilst dealing with large numbers of clients who have been adversely affected or ostracised by the aforementioned drive for profits and results. These marginalised people seek out a counsellor, such as myself, because they cannot function to the required level within a society that predominantly promotes competition and self-interest over altruism and cooperation as it often not aligns with their world-view.

2.11- The Absurdities of Missing Self-care

Modern society seems to be made up of “notoriously unhappy people: lonely, anxious, depressed, destructive, dependent – people who are glad when they have killed the time that they were trying so hard to save” (Fromm, 1976, p.15). It is absurd to work until one’s health is compromised, however for many people it is difficult to let go of a task, or projects, even though they know that it is beneficial to let go for a while and recuperate. There is constant pressure to work harder, in a world that seems to thrive on this form of insanity. The so-called civilised person seems to live in fear of failing, constantly aiming towards the arrival at an elusive finish line to collect the rewards, whilst feeling miserable all the way there (Tolle, 2006). The psychological condition underlying this form of insanity reminds me of the way baboons are captured in Africa. The hunters set up a container with an opening that is just big enough

for the monkey to fit his hand through and then a piece of fruit is placed inside that will not fit through the hole. Once the animal gets hold of the fruit that is placed inside the box he will not let go, and the hunters can capture it with ease, and his fate is sealed (Chancellor, 2012).

Similarly people hang on to behaviours that are ultimately detrimental to wellbeing, productivity, and sense of peace. It seems that society has also their hands stuck in a trap. The political discourse is the fruit leading to a dangerous inertia creating sickness, discontent and destruction and limiting the ability to imagine a new construct. Part of my challenge with this conundrum is linked to my struggle to maintain good self-care. I will use in Chapter 6 solution-focused therapeutic approach to shift some of my perceived problems with maintaining good self-care.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Perspectives

3.1 Reasons for Choosing a Particular Theoretical Lens

My postgraduate studies were underpinned by social constructionist theories that informed solution-focused therapy which was the main modality taught in our counselling course. I remember my curiosity when Judi Miller, our professor, introduced the basic assumptions of this approach with one particular aspect still reverberating in my mind: "Our assumption is that our clients are the experts of their lives, we the therapists use their expertise to support them to find new ways of dealing with their impasses." I remember thinking that this makes sense, because human experiences are too complex to fit into precise schematics that are based on someone's particular ideas about reality, even if that someone is supposed to be the expert. Since then I have adopted poststructuralist thinking in my practice and also internalised some other assumptions about what we call reality, truth, power, identity, and other such concepts. Social existence is a complex evolving network that cannot be easily apprehended by language or other forms of communication. This is on the one hand opening up an endless array of possibilities, questions and responses but it also brings with it a level of uncertainty. I chose to embrace uncertainty because that is what I work with as a counsellor.

3.2 Introduction – Chapter on Theory

"Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare" (Lorde, 1988). Lorde's observation is an inspiration to resist; however, I first need to reflect on the status quo and my practices to ascertain what it is I need to resist. I need

to become aware of my actions inspired by particular discourses. Once I am aware of the repetition of behaviours, I may conceptualise what has happened and choose to develop plans to change. This is a social process, because I am not living in isolation and share with others what I think or could do differently to create outcomes. These ideally do not only support me, but also the community I inhabit as is suggested in social constructionism. Ideally this process constructs a future that will revolutionise my existence and maybe to some extent my social environment.

The first part of this chapter introduces how I envisage this process, using Dewey's developmental spiral (1933) as an organising framework: *experience, reflection, conceptualisation, and spiralling forwards into experience*. Each component engenders the start of a new cycle that leads to a development that facilitates the reconstruction of knowledge and skills in light of new experiences. This thesis is structured in a similar way. The auto-ethnographic approach enables me to look at my *experience* that I reflect upon by using social constructionist assumptions and Foucauldian discourse analysis to uncover the underlying hegemonic discourses. This chapter discusses as part of the *conceptualisation* the creation of socially constructed solutions which are informed by Foucauldian and other theories. These concepts will ideally engender altered behaviours in response to new *experiences* completing the reflective spiral, followed by testing the new found knowledges in a renewed cycle. I outline social constructionism as a form of critique, uncovering the process of knowledge creation as a social phenomenon. I deliberate how this theory assists me to deconstruct existing discourses and how to create divergent meanings in regards to self-care. The deconstruction of discourses and analysis of underlying power relations that are explored are informed by Foucault's

theories. I link ideas from a number of theorists; these combine into a bricolage, which I then use in the manner Foucault offers of his own material:

All my books ... are little tool boxes ... if people want to open them, to use this sentence or that idea as a screwdriver or spanner to short-circuit, discredit or smash systems of power, including eventually those from which my books have emerged ... so much better!" (Foucault, 1975, p. 115)

This chapter explores a number of such theoretical "little tool boxes" to assist me in finding new understandings of the ways society has imposed particular beliefs on me, or how I impose mine on society, and how the power structures influence behaviours and identity. In Chapter 5 I deconstruct some of the influences these discourses have had on my conduct and understanding of myself. My intention is to use the technologies of the self (Foucault, 1994b), such as the act of critique, so that I am able to examine the discourses that diminish my sense of agency and cause me to see myself for example as a disenfranchised cog in the machinery of the wheels of current political discourses. The main thrust of this critique is the neoliberal capitalist discourse and how it influences my work both as an individual and also as a professional. For instance, I want to become aware of how my engagement in such discourses creates a sense of defeatism and depression that may place me in the territory of burnout, compassion fatigue, and vicarious traumatising. In this chapter I also explore are notions of labour/work, work life balance, education, identity.

3.3 Theoretical Perspectives – Reflexivity and Writing as a Reflective Process

Reflexivity is vital for social workers, teachers and counsellors. “Systematic reflexivity is the constant analysis of one’s own theoretical and methodological presuppositions,” (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005, p. 6) and comprises an ongoing self-analysis of action. My personal history and assumptions play an important part in the reflective process. In addition an awareness of the societal constructs that form my behaviours are also relevant, which ideally leads to a thorough inward scrutiny of every interaction and how it is created. Whether it involves counselling or any other action in life, my emotional being, thoughts, and motives within a context, all play a role. This thesis is part of this process using the concept of reflexivity, in a feed forward interface between what has been actioned and an observable outcome to that action. Dewey (1933) suggests that the reflective process can be described as a developmental spiral where the learning from one cycle engenders the start of a new cycle in an ongoing process. This, he suggests, leads ideally to reconstructing knowledge and skills in light of new experiences. If, for instance, ethical considerations enter the developmental spiral it may lead to me becoming an “ethical practitioner, within the wider social, cultural and political contexts that influence the stories and discourses we engage in with others” (Stedmon & Dallos 2009, p.20). The reflexivity that I aim for is linked to a creative agency that invigorates my sense of transitioning to new forms of being and identity while choosing consciously the ways I create or engage in discourses. It also is a process that incorporates trust and respect for the people I engage with again being aware of the judgements and beliefs that are based on societal constructs. These considerations need to enter the reflective cycle continuously whilst considering personal and cultural boundaries. Reflective writing can enhance the process of

reflection and develop the effectiveness of professional practice (Slessor, et al., 2015). The process of writing this thesis observes the concept of Dewey's developmental spiral by using the four stages: *experience*, *reflection*, *conceptualisation*, and *experimentation*. The first part of the developmental spiral explores my experience with the discourse of neoliberalism and self-care and how these constructs influenced my perceived reality. This part is also explored in the auto-ethnographic sections that connect to historical events I deemed pertinent. The reflection part of the developmental spiral is connected to the theoretical underpinning of this thesis and uses a number of theorists' contributions to deconstruct for instance the discourses self-care and the neoliberalism. The conceptualisation links the first two parts and explores solutions to the described problems. The fourth stage, experimentation puts the three previous processes to the test by implementing them into actions.

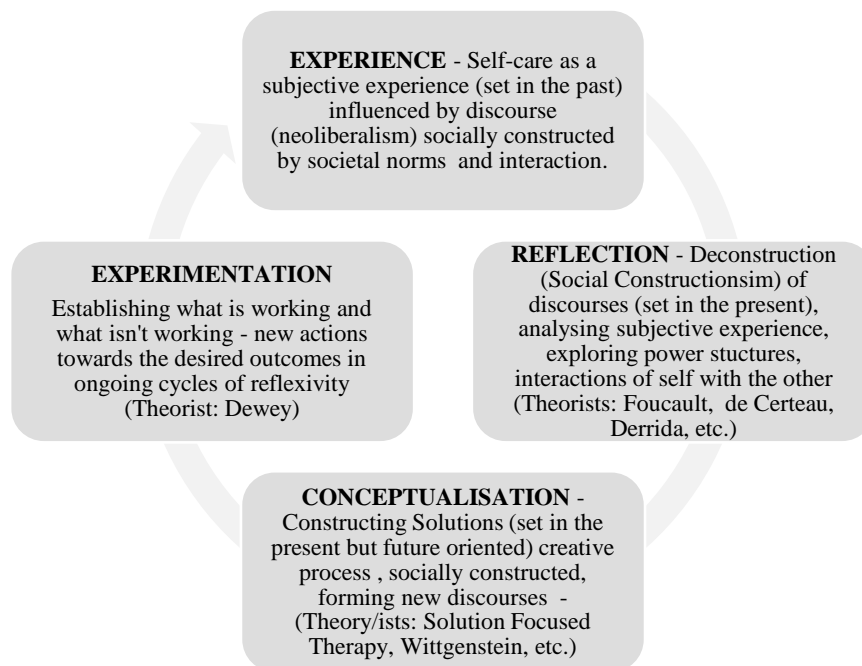


Figure 1: The conceptual framework of this thesis based on Dewey's developmental spiral (1933)

3.4 Theoretical Perspectives – Social Constructionism as a Form of Critique

From its conception, constructionist research has emphasised both the dynamic forms of social reality and the processes involved when social reality is assembled and given meaning by social actors (Latour, 2005; Holstein & Gubrium, 2007). Social constructionism invites the deconstruction of social practice and lived events to redefine perspectives, which then support the emergence of different social arrangements (Andrews, 2012). Social constructionism envelops a number of theoretical approaches that assist the study of people as social beings and have appeared under a variety of rubrics, such as critical psychology, discourse analysis, deconstruction and poststructuralism (Burr, 2003). Social constructionism can be explained as a perspective which postulates that human life and society evolve because of social and interpersonal influences through meaning making processes utilising language (Andrews, 2012). “Although the roots of constructionist thought may be traced to long-standing debates between empiricist and rationalist schools of thought, constructionism moves beyond the dualism of these traditions and places knowledge within the process of social interchange” (Gergen, 1985 p.266). Social Constructionism does not deny the influence of genetic inheritance. It does, however, disagree with deterministic assumptions about both the nature of the mind and also theories of causality (Owen, 1995). It places an importance on the intricacy and interrelatedness of the multitude of aspects of individuals within their groups and wider society (Galbin, 2015). I am influenced by my experiences of culture, both past and present,

with the inherent constructs that emanate from these points of contact that create my behaviours about self-care:

a) A critical standpoint towards my own and so-called established knowledge:

I want to be critical of the idea that my, or others', observations can create irrefutable facts.

Instead I want to pay attention to the language that I, or they, use to describe phenomena which remain subjective in nature and open for continuous adjustments through exchange with others.

b) Historically and culturally anchored but in constant flux:

I need to be aware of the ways in which I comprehend the world, the classifications, and conceptions I use. I need to be aware that they are historically and culturally specific but are constantly changing and therefore are relative, not fixed.

c) Knowledge is constructed by social processes and interaction:

I co-create meaning continuously in my social groups through the use of language and through the way I interact, dress, or use my body. My to-ing and fro-ing with others day in and day out, my habits, and my actions are the laboratory of my research. There is no certainty or truth to obtain. There are instead current perceptions of reality that are constantly changing that are influenced by cultural influences and time.

d) Observing that current understanding influences social action:

Consensus achieved through various mechanisms of influence shapes social interaction. The construction of meaning lies with the individual and groups who have differing access or powers to create so-called realities (Burr, 2003). Embedded in our social realms we negotiate our interactions with discourses and thus create social constructs, discourses, beliefs, rules, etc.

and re-negotiate these continuously. This process is only possible if the individual accepts the constructs as real or true and manifests these constructs in form of behaviour lending them materiality.

3.5 Theoretical Perspectives – Discourse and Power

“Knowledge is in the end based on acknowledgement” (Wittgenstein, 1969, paragraph 378). I concur with Wittgenstein’s statement that what we believe to be true is usually based on our conscious or subconscious acceptance, or rejection, of that belief. Foucault (1972) explains that discourses are “an entity of sequences, of signs, in that they are announcements” (p.11) in a public domain. In addition any area of communicated knowledge can be categorised as a discursive field because these announcements create a particular account of events within domains such as the law or the family (Snow, 2013). These can hold a series of competing and contradictory discourses with changing levels of power to attribute meaning, structure social institutions and processes, and also offer a range of modes of subjectivity (Weedon, 1987). Burr (2003) defines discourse as a concept to describe the multitude of societal processes comprising associations, inferences, descriptions, images, narratives, and other material that have been declared to be correct. Lessa (2006) encapsulates Foucauldian ideas of discourse as “systems of thoughts composed of ideas, attitudes, courses of action, beliefs and practices that systematically construct the subjects and the worlds of which they speak” (p. 287). Foucault describes the role of discourses in social processes of legitimatising power, underlining the construction of contemporary truths, methods of how they are upheld and the kind of power relations they carry with them (Strega, 2005). Discourse creates meanings and facilitates by

means of power relations to produce a “speaking subject” (Foucault, 1988b, p. 61) that is often perceived as the self. Discourses are disseminated, internalised, and reproduced both consciously and also unconsciously. De Certeau (1984) termed the creator of hegemonic discourses “producers” and the user “consumers”. He suggests that discourses are constantly changed and altered as they circulate in society. The subject constantly alters discourses because it is a means of retaining power but it is also an obstacle and it can be met with opposition (Foucault, 1978). If, from this, I assume that discourses have power in the form of internalised and regurgitated truth-statements (such as the concept of the hardworking professional), these then influence the formation of identity.

3.6 Theoretical Perspectives - Power Relations – Discourse and Identity

“Power is everywhere: not that it engulfs everything, but that it comes from everywhere” (Foucault, 1978, p. 121-122). Foucault’s philosophy is a method to support the investigator how the social world, conveyed through language and behaviours, is affected by countless sources of power (Given, 2008). Foucault assumed that power is everywhere because humans preferred modes of being to encompass the use of words to create reality in relationships with others and are therefore inherent in all human relations (Burr, 2003). The writing, speaking, or acting person is constantly in the process of constructing discourses that reveal prevailing power relationships in social settings (Burr, 2003). An analysis attempts to understand how a person views the world, and explores categorisations, personal and institutional relationships, ideology, and politics (Wooffitt, 2005). Foucault (1980) proposes that power and knowledge are bound to each other and knowledge is created by power, and power

is created by announced knowledge in a self-perpetuating process. Foucault (1980) suggests that when the mechanisms of power are obscure they can be attributed the status of truth and connected to certain truisms that are bestowed by the subject. His interest was to study these power-knowledge relations and in how far they influence society. He assumed that the power-knowledge relation engenders normalising judgements that shape identity, determine interactions with others and produce behaviour that is conducted by, but also operates on the subject (Best, & Kellner, 1997). This means, according to Foucault's theory, that I internalise or externalise the aforementioned normalising judgments constantly influencing my and others' reality. Butler (1990) suggests that the result is that the subject conducts their existence, performs their gender, and manipulates their bodies and sense of identity in accordance with the perceived truth. The emphasis of Foucault's research was to depart from the suppressor – oppressed binary that he situated in preindustrial times to explore how power functions in modern times (Best, & Kellner, 1997). Foucault argued that the individual is assembled and repressed by discourse and at the same time exercises power through assembly of discourse (Foucault, 1985). His way of interpreting power was an invitation to assess with a critical eye the limits of the produced discourses and how the subject can create alternatives that lead to preferred manifestations (Burr, 2003). As a consequence, this type of examination does not explore the macro level of power but looks into the hidden mechanisms of power by scrutinising ordinary day to day practices (Foucault, 1980). For my research this type of analysis invites me to examine the way I comply with the internal demands to perform in specific ways that may be linked to societal expectations. In the counselling profession this might mean working long hours but this work habit may become part of the counsellor's identity.

Resistance and acceptance of various discourses is also closely related to construction of identity. Foucault (1994b) suggests that this rejecting or accepting is a vital ethical process of self-formation, because to further one's concern with the self is an ethical concern and political activity through critique. Whilst identity is a result of the rejection or acceptance of discourse, the subject can also have influence on the society by engendering, changing and disseminating their altered selves and related behaviours. Foucault also suggests that truth games and power/knowledge do not necessarily subjugate the subject, but offer a variety of ways for the subject to produce renewed ideas of self and a concept of a changing identity. Similar to Foucault, De Certeau stresses the importance of the "Practice of Everyday Life" and the scope for the subject to influence their subjugation to discourses by overcoming the binaries of opposition and subjugation (1988). He suggests that the part that has remained silent needs to be brought to the fore and given a voice to be able to explore the experimental part of the self that can be discovered in the mundane (Tomasik, 2001).

3.7 Theoretical Perspectives – Construction of Identity

"Unfortunately, we have forgotten the care for self... It is the key for everything" (Foucault, 1987, p. 14). Foucault's announcement rings true; I also believe that it is up to each subject to question the hegemonic discourses that suppress their level of self-care. My interest for this thesis is to explore some of my normalising statements that compromise self-care and invite a flexible approach to the way I define myself as a person (e.g. the discourse of the highly functional professional). But posing these types of curiosities I need to involve the mechanism of how I assemble my identity. This includes both my private and professional identities,

because I would argue that self-care should ideally address both. As is my practice for clients, in this study, I seek to use language to reconstruct different ways that self-care may benefit my wellbeing and have an impact on my identity and perhaps also on the reader's identity. In this segment I link the theory of the concept of identity with self-care because self-care is a mechanism closely related to the construction of identity. It commences when I enter the world, being exposed to influences that are all linked to current and historical power structures negotiated by language and actions. Irrespective of working as a counsellor, I am living my own life, struggling with similar hegemonic discourses as those who seek me out in my professional capacity. In both my professional and personal life I am constantly "storying" my professional and private identities while I am in relationship with others (Winslade, 2002).

In that respect self-care influences my whole being, including who I become. I sympathise with the idea that identities are fluid in nature and not set in concrete, or ahead of, or external to language (St Pierre, 2010). This concept is essential in a profession that utilises the language with clients who seek change that also influences their identities. Davies (1998) suggests that there are many discourses that construct the subject. Who and what I am, is created or "storied" through multiple discourses, some seemingly immovable, others with more immediate and apparent effects than others (Winslade, 2002). When describing the concept of identity I am not thinking of a self-contained notion of identity, one that is owned within the individual and independent of how I am experienced by those consulting or interacting with me (Winslade, 2002). Instead, I am interested in the devices (language and other behaviours) of how my identity is formed while interacting with others, a notion that is in line with social constructionist concepts of identity (Shotter & Gergen 1989). Hall and Du Gay (1996) describe

identity as a zone of conflict and power struggles that is reflected in the emergence of gender, queer, and postcolonial (to name a few) perspectives that questions conventional ideas of identity. They note:

The concept of identity...is therefore not an essentialist, but a strategic and positional one...identities are never unified and, in late modern times, increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions. (p.4)

Similar to Hall and Du Gay, Rose (1996 in Hall & Du Gay) uses the idea of a “genealogy of subjectification” (p.128) that describes how a person can become locked into particular “regimes of the person”. Rose relates this concept to Foucault’s “our relation to ourselves” that infers the reflexive mode, rather than the substantive mode (p.129). Rose argues that the “changing relations of subjectification” may not be established by “derivation or interpretation of other cultural or social forms” (p.147) because that would mean that people are capable of providing meaning in an objective independent manner that does not include their own unique vantage point. Rose’s assertions are in accordance with the theoretical approach and the assumed role that the concept of identity might play in my thesis. I am not attempting to make all-encompassing statements about the formation of identity in this study but rather make suggestions that are based on my experience. I see identity as “what I would refer to as *self-in-context*” (in the Buddhist sense), a concept that has recently been validated by research in neuroscience. This research suggests that “self-processing in the brain is not instantiated in a particular region or network, but rather extends to a broad range of fluctuating neural

processes that do not appear to be self specific,” (Dahl, et al., 2015). The self is exposed to sensations, discourse and ever changing social situations. This process is not supported by exclusively defining the discourses or formation of identity with the use of predestined and limiting definitions. These labels are limiting and often restrict the process of reflection to thinking in terms of good and bad leaving little room for exceptions; however, in my view, exceptions are the source of establishing patterns of workable solutions (De Shazer & Dolan, 2012).

3.8 Theoretical Perspectives – Escaping the Binaries of Power

My aim in this thesis is to use auto-ethnography, De Certeau’s theories of everyday practices, and Foucauldian discourse analysis as a vehicle to give meaning to experience in context and to avoid limiting viewpoints. This process relies on my experiences while belonging to countless cultural formations using a multitude of devices of meaning production. In addition the production of discourses and the use of it is observable in networks of conceptualisations, terminologies, customs, and schemes of judgement that create experience; they are not necessarily themselves produced by experience but by observing discourse (Dijk, 1998).

Foucault, on a similar vein, suggests that:

The target nowadays is not to discover what we are but to refuse what we are.

We have to imagine and to build up what we could be to get rid of this kind of political "double bind," which is the simultaneous individualization and totalization of modern power structures (Foucault, 1982, no. 785).

Foucault's explorations of how power functions offers an explanation on how the individual is assembled by discourse and at the same time exercises power (Foucault, 1985). He offers a different mode of analysis that aims to problematise the limitations of the binaries offered by discourses and focuses on the availability of alternative positions and possibilities (Best & Kellner, 1991). For my particular research this type of analysis invites me to critique the way I succumb to internal demands to comply and perform in certain ways that may be linked to societal expectations that I have internalised (e.g. working long hours). While these mechanisms of power are obscure, they can, however, be attributed a status of truth and connected to certain epistemologies about the self or reality (Burr, 2003; Dunlap, 1997). Although the use of language is the key to dissolve some of the perspectives that create unfavourable modes of being, it is important to give this exploration authenticity by using real life occurrences. I can provide a tangible critique of some of the discourses that have an impact on my self-care; how far this can be judged valuable beyond the research context is the prerogative of the reader. I can offer this research as an invitation to explore this subject on an individual basis and use this work as a stimulus. Foucault (1994) proposes that care of the self involves lifelong work on one's body, mind, and soul, in order to better relate to others and the world whilst living an ethically-driven life. This, is worthy of consideration for my academic research because I do not wish to change someone's way of looking at things by claiming a truth. Instead I align myself with Wittgenstein who suggests that "the essence of our investigation [is] to understand something that is already in plain view" (1953, no. 89). What that understanding is, only the individual can decide, while needing to be aware of the inherent power of all announcements that penetrate their senses.

3.9 Theoretical Perspectives – Language Games, Truth, and Power

Discourse analysis does not aim at attaining a truth (Parker, 1992) but maintains a relativist stance. It is of interest to elaborate on how some discourses may operate as truthful, and to explore the power structures that underpin, motivate, and benefit from the truth claims of the discourse in question (Hook, 2001). I am not only interested in the language systems that are at play but also the truth games that Said (1983) describes as follows:

The will to exercise...control in society and history has also discovered a way to clothe, disguise, rarefy and wrap itself systematically in the language of truth, discipline, rationality, utilitarian value, and knowledge. And this language in its naturalness, authority, professionalism, assertiveness and anti-theoretical directness is....discourse (p.216).

In a similar vein, Foucault writes about “a set of rules by which truth is produced... is a set of procedures that lead to a certain result, which, on the basis of its principles and rules of procedure, may be considered valid or invalid, winning or losing” (1994d, p. 297). In this thesis I probe, for example, the neoliberal discourse and related truth assertions that have an impact on my practices of self-care. For this purpose I link these discourses with parts of what Foucault describes as “history which determined [me] [and] has the form of a war rather than that of language: relations of power, not [mere] relations of meaning” (1980b, p. 114). I am interested in linking the discourse self-care with forms of war, for example the Second World War, or other events of similar magnitude outlined earlier (see Klein, 2007). The focus for me is, therefore, not a form of aestheticism, exploring the various forms of signifiers, a notion I

believe the theorists this thesis rests on ultimately reject. Best and Kellner (1991) suggest that such academic language games are all but a distraction and they stress the importance of care of the self, autonomy, and the practices of freedom. I want to explore the formation of the discourses relating to my history to awaken my creative potential and exercise my agency by utilising the concepts of the selected theorists. The aim is to aid the formation of my identities, keeping in mind that the “self is not given to us” (Foucault, 1994, p.262) and to incorporate the concept of self-care as my unique paradigm to assist me in this quest. This means to elevate the discourses surrounding my self-care by assuming the will to self-govern and assert power by rejecting, for instance, the discourse of continuous existential fears over losing my employment. Such fears are fostered by the hegemonic neoliberal discourse by dictating endless cycles of re-structuring the workforces (Özegin, 2014; Hackell, 2007).

3.10 Theoretical Perspectives - Theory of Everyday Life

I recently watched a TED presentation by Ron Finley who introduced the concept of guerrilla gardening in his neighbourhood in South Los Angeles. Finley's colourful language describes his initiative to change the depressed urban landscape that consists of liquor stores, fast food outlets and vacant lots into sustainable plots of vegetable gardens, which transform his neighbourhood and the people living there (Finley, 2013). When I was listening to Finley's account De Certeau's theories outlined in Practice of Everyday Life (1988) came to mind, merging with Finley's actions and now giving me an academically acceptable theory to employ for this thesis.

Finley's ingenuity is based on seeing an opportunity to change the social fabric of his environment with what some would call a mundane activity. I prefer to think of it as a revolutionary act and feel inspired to turn my attention towards myself as a representative of the ordinary practices of everyday life. I believe that it is in "the everyday that emancipation might be found (if it is to be found at all)" (Highmore, 2002, p.29). I pose that De Certeau's *Practice of Everyday Life* (1988) is compatible with auto-ethnography and promotes a rethinking of binaries such as *resistance* and *power*. I want to reconsider the act of representation "as a foregrounding and recognising of the everyday and by reimagining the practice of critique by potentially generating new forms of critical practice" (Highmore, 2002, p.30). To engage in everyday theory enables with all my minuscule actions to challenge the "ministers of knowledge" (De Certeau, 1988, p.96) and their discourses "conventionally and endlessly played out... [and] oblivious to the everyday" (Highmore, 2002, p.30). De Certeau (1988) suggests that we can try another path instead of getting stuck inside the territory of a discourse "that upholds its privilege by inverting its content (p.96)." He describes this process as follows:

Belief no longer rests on an invisible alterity hidden behind signs, but on what other groups, other fields, or other disciplines are supposed to be. The "real" is what, in a given place, reference to another place makes people believe in (p.188).

For the purpose of maintaining self-care I am also interested in the "microbe-like, singular and plural practices which an urbanistic system was supposed to administer or suppress, but which have outlived its decay" (De Certeau, 1988, p.96). I want to use my own "technologies of the

self" (Foucault, 1994b) and "tactics" (1988, De Certeau) to further my understanding of who I want to become at any given moment. This creates the new self while seeking emancipation from the discourses that do not serve me. De Certeau delivered the theory to what Finley with his guerrilla gardening achieves in reality. De Certeau links "strategies" with institutions and structures of power that are the "producers", while individuals are the "consumers", acting in environments defined by strategies by using "tactics". In *Walking in the City* (1988), De Certeau states that the city is shaped by the strategies of administrations, corporations, and other institutional bodies who are "organized by 'speculative' and 'classificatory' operations" (1988, p. 94) and produce things like maps that describe the city as a unified whole. He utilises the panorama from the World Trade Center in New York to exemplify the concept of a synoptic, merged view. In stark contrast, however, to such instituted restraints and constructs the person who is walking far below at street level travels in ways that are "tactical" (De Certeau, 1988) and never fully determined by the plans of the organising bodies. In a manner similar to Finley, who uses the city structures not as they were meant to be adhered to, the subject takes shortcuts in spite of the strategic grid of the streets. De Certeau's observation incorporates the argument that everyday life works by a process of appropriation, invading the territory of others, while altering the procedures and products that already exist in culture. He proposes that the cultures of ordinary everyday life can be located beneath the exterior of a social and textual authority created by what he called the "producers" (De Certeau, 1988). These submerged cultures are inclined to stay obscure and unrepresentable whilst the "consumers" perform constantly an act of sabotage on these authorities ("producers"), not in an open conflict but as undefinable form of resistance (De Certeau, 1988).

One can follow the swarming activity of these procedures that, far from being regulated or eliminated by panoptic administration, have reinforced themselves in a proliferating illegitimacy, developed and insinuated themselves into the networks of surveillance, and combined in accord with unreadable but stable tactics to the point of constituting everyday regulations and surreptitious creativities that are merely concealed by the frantic mechanisms and discourses of the observational organization (De Certeau. 1988, p.96).

De Certeau's (1988) exploration into the mechanism of mundane rituals and practices that he called the "arts of doing", such as crossing the streets, having conversations, residing in dwellings, or preparing a meal, offers hope in a structured world that seems impregnable. He suggests that we all have agency despite a world that seems contrived and controlled by forces beyond our control. De Certeau's theory fits on the social-constructionist continuum because it invites me to deconstruct social practices and lived events to redefine perspectives to support the emergence of different social arrangements (Burr, 2003). For De Certeau, "tactics" (1988) are actions in a constant state of revaluation and correction, founded directly on observations of the actual environment. To return to Finley and the example of guerrilla gardening, Finley first assessed his basic needs – his own highly controlled and unhealthy food supply and then from there saw that his neighbourhood was missing the same basic need. He reassessed constantly the producers and their strategies (producers – e.g. fast-food corporations) and responded with his tactics by planting vegetable plots on county land while giving unemployed people new purpose by joining him. De Certeau's theory is helpful as an underpinning to reflexivity because it focuses on the here and now. It encourages a constant adjustment to an

ever changing social environment. For instance, within the domain of linguistic systems (discourses) I appropriate, or re-appropriate, language that creates a reality contingent to a time and place. When this takes place in my interaction with others it has an effect on a network of spaces and human connections, like stones that are cast into a pond creating ripples that converge in an ongoing motion. This type of occurrence is central to De Certeau's (1988) theory but besides language we can also incorporate other everyday practices. He suggests elevating these and their infinite transformational properties "within the dominant cultural economy... adapt[ing] it to... [our] own interests and... rules...with this collective activity" (xiv). De Certeau's theories also possess strong parallels to solution-focused therapy in that it also utilises the creative act of appropriation or re-appropriation as a communal action, allowing the formation or re-formation of workable solutions. This process can be exemplified by returning to the hegemonic discourse of neoliberalism that promotes restructuring of workforces as a means of a control that creates unemployment and hardship. In line with solution-focused therapy I can choose to focus on possible solutions (like Finley) instead of getting stuck in the problem (high unemployment in Finley's neighbourhood). Finley assessed his environment and its structures using de Certeauian tactics to overcome the impasse, while at the same time overcoming the power structures that were maintaining it. Everyday life theory offers a creative alternative to subjugation by all controlling discourses by growing our awareness about what is right in front of our eyes (Wittgenstein, 1953).

3.11 Theoretical Perspectives - Meditations on Truth and Power

The ministers of knowledge have always assumed that the whole universe was threatened by the very changes that affected their ideologies and their positions. They transmute the misfortune of their theories into theories of misfortune. When they transform their bewilderment into "catastrophes," when they seek to enclose the people in the "panic" of their discourses, are they once more necessarily right (De Certeau, 1988, p.96).

De Certeau's quotation reminds me of the way people in some African cultures describe the act of casting an evil spell. For instance, I can picture myself becoming bewitched by the news of an alleged economic downturn and feel disempowered because I may believe the orthodoxy of the so science of economics, a discourse, disguised as a form of orthodoxy, to serve the few and enslave the masses. However, part of my suggested method of self-care is to break the spell and use tactics to find new solutions and disregard the "ministers of knowledge" (De Certeau, 1988, p.96). De Certeau's (1988) writing supports me to interrupt the theories announced by the "producers" as a means to explain, or appease, the conflicts between the diversity of everyday practices and their quest for dominance. His work questions the idea of theory as rationality that declares isolated occurrences as an accepted way of knowing reality and, furthermore, warns not to fall victim to the discourse of academic righteousness (Napolitano & Pratten, 2007). In a similar vein, Foucault (2007) argues that "truth is not defined by a correspondence to reality but as a force inherent to principles and which has to be developed in a discourse" (pp. 163-164). Claiming an irrefutable truth is a matter of assuming a position of argumentation that usually aims at being rewarded with power. Who do we answer

to for the need to generate truth? Who is asserting truth by design? Even though animals cannot read they are living with me in this world. My anthropocentrism has an effect on what may be perceived by an animal to be truthful (Singer, 2004). My anthropocentrism is a symptom of other isms, such as racism or speciesism (Monson, 2010). Being male, white, middle class, and European places me within certain constructs and discourses. The white privilege (Wise, 2013) that I utilise living in a society that incarcerates the “Māori other” (Walker, 1996) at a ratio of two to one (Cunneen, et al. 2013; Aljazeera, 2013) has an impact on the truth that I may assemble from my vantage point. I acknowledge that I am culpable of having privilege and being persuaded by some exclusive forms of knowledge. I cannot ignore the belonging to the group that continuously imposes colonisation on others with their discourses and power structures with relative success (if genocide, cultural domination (Reyhner & Singh, 2010) and global ecological devastation (Jensen, 2006) can be defined as success). I also acknowledge that I have countless blind spots, ignorance, predispositions, and judgements. Questions of researching for truths (regardless of if I am the investigator or the investigated) are arbitrated by the inconstant fabrics of a cultural and social realm, and a disregard of other species, ethnicities, and a dying ecological system. My conundrum is how to research truths without the essentialism and positivism that postmodernity has discarded? Where is truth to be found if we are living in our own subjective worlds where no collective human experiences can be recorded and placed in a thematic schema to offer a scientific formula or other interpretive labels? As soon as I enter the domain of language in the search of veracity I become subject to what Derrida called the

Western preconception with truth as a presence (essence, existence, substance, and subject)... [these] phonemes derive their significance from their ability to contrast recognizably with other sounds, and to replace other phonemes in words, so our understanding of a word depends on other words — on an endless chain of signifiers, pointing to nothing beyond themselves and developing out a history of usage entirely lost to us (Derrida, as quoted in Roy, 2010, p.144).

One could argue that embodiment may be outside Derrida's critique of an endless motion of signifying. Butler (1990) proposed that terminological classes to describe people, in terms of class, age, faith, ethnicity, sexuality, and race, exist within a matrix of dissimilarities. But how can such categorising assist to construct veracity or irrefutable facts when used in social research to what Butler calls dissimilarities? What about all these extraneous factors that influence any investigation at any given moment or point? "This culturally/religiously produced subject is defined not only by a particular position in a social, economic and religious matrix, but by a complex subjectivity, complex set of feelings and fears, which are central to a whole argument" (Ortner, 2005. p. 37).

How can we quantify the trillions of networks, categories, and emotions for people and their ever changing experiences even if we know that they are born with different coloured skin? When looking at this from this extreme perspective, any attempt to obtain truthfulness seems to result in endless interpretation and all we can do is point to its workings (Derrida, 1976). It is then fair to say, that there is no one truth that can be reported concerning the subjective experiences of the world we investigate.

3.12 Theoretical Perspectives – Embracing Relativism

Maybe it would be helpful to embrace the idea of “not knowing” (Anderson & Goolishian, 1992) and treat (my) investigations as a creative process that may yield solutions that are illogical and contradictory? What I then may be able to achieve is an interpretation of my personal thoughts and reflections that take into account the discourses, assumptions, ideals, and worldview as they are materialising in the society that I encounter or work with, at the same time as witnessing my own narratives (Dunlap, 1997). This means that all I can offer is to capture snapshots in time, adding interpretations that may assist in my analysis and which may ultimately yield value in the form of pragmatism or consensus. I also acknowledge that I am susceptible to the truth assertions entrenched within discourse, because I take part in them, disseminate them, and at times I struggle and clash with some discourses. I am not immune to the power and truth games and need to bear in mind that both subjugated and dominant knowledges are assembled by discourses through language use, which are elusive and regularly unconscious (Foucault, 1990). It will, therefore, be useful for me to cultivate a greater understanding about my own discursive formations and power relations to avoid falling victim to my own agendas. I am in agreement with Foucault (as quoted by Hook, 2007) who suggested “linear causality and narratives of progress, continuity and evolution are not always the most profitable methodological tools of analysis” (as quoted by Hook, 2007, p. 21). I am prepared to follow Foucault’s lead and embrace chaos and change, accepting that “every explanation is after all a hypothesis” (Wittgenstein, 1953, p.123).

3.13 - Changing my Perspectives – Creating a Space - Reflexivity - Changing Identity

I don't think therefore I am.

Two years ago I partook in a silent retreat for 10 days. I had the desire to experience something without the constant bombardment of sensations and impulses - I wanted to be liberated from the spectacle, even if it was only momentarily. Three days after arriving at the retreat centre that was located in a beautiful valley, the battle with my mind became almost unbearable. My mind chatter was relentless and kept me awake at night and spoilt the hours of meditation nearly every moment. Stuck in my head I was hearing a repeated message "that I needed to do something useful instead of sitting around wasting my time". I was angry with myself for creating this situation, constantly thinking about leaving and unable to arrive where I was. But my desire to break out of this prison of my thoughts made me curious at the same time. I wanted to know what is really there without this relentless busy mind of mine. Was it possible not to think, not to have the constant explanations of what reality is, telling me who I was, what I should do or meant to experience? And then it happened not only in my mind, but in my whole body, I suddenly felt peace, and moments of nothingness opened up a space that was so vast that I wanted to disappear into it never to return. My mind was silent - only for moments at a time. I felt peace, my thoughts started to flow in at a reduced speed and I was able to ponder one at time not really taking them that seriously. All the things that I did from brushing my teeth to eating a meal had suddenly a different quality. I was actually doing them instead of explaining to myself that I was doing them or having constant chatter and agendas occupying my mind. Now looking back just remembering this state of being opens a space in my mind allowing me to access the peacefulness that I experienced then. This assists me to look thoughts/language as the

raw material that assembles discourse and how I want assemble what I am already and what I want to become as I move forward.

3.14 - Solution-focused Therapy – Co-constructing a New Narrative

This section explains the solution-focused approach that I will use in Chapter 6 to shift the problem laden narrative that I have described in other chapters (e.g. the influence of hegemonic discourse neoliberalism on maintaining self-care). In Chapter 6 I use solution-focused methods to discuss my problems with a number of colleagues to work on desired change, integrating some of the materials from this thesis that have assisted me. I document these sessions with the purpose of demonstrating how to create a more helpful narrative that is linked to concrete behaviours. One of the reasons for selecting solution-focused therapy to support me with change is that I believe that I have some of the answers already but need to bring them to the fore. This is also one of the tenets of the solution-focused approach. In reading Chapter 6, I hope that the reader will also get a sense of how they may also already possess the ability to find specific solutions to their own problems with maintaining self-care. Solution-focused therapy was initially instituted as group treatment and is founded “on over twenty years of theoretical development, clinical practice, and empirical studies” (Trepper et al., 2010, p. 1). Solution-focused therapy is a goal oriented collaborative talking therapy that utilises direct observation of clients' responses to a sequence of presuppositional and other specifically constructed questions (De Shazer & Dolan, 2012). The specific questions that are asked are intended to enable practitioners to pay close attention to clients' language and meanings that expresses what desired changes they want and how they have already started to

implement them or how they envisage bringing about the changes (De Shazer & Dolan, 2012).

The theoretical underpinning of solution-focused therapy is social constructionism and Wittgenstein's philosophy, particularly as expressed in *Philosophical Investigation* (De Shazer & Dolan, 2012). Wittgenstein proposed that the meanings of words are not found in dictionaries but rather the varying forms of using language are like a web of different routes located in unique real life situations. He suggested that problems and solutions are socially constructed ways of existing, sustained by various language games that create outcomes that the individual labels as negative or positive (expected/unexpected, etc.). Solution-focused therapy is a flexible approach that can incorporate other language based theories, approaches, and interventions that are deemed helpful in overcoming a client impasse (Trepper, et al., 2010). This view also incorporates the notion that practitioners should encourage their clients to continue with other therapies and approaches that are helpful. One of the original and primary tenets of solution-focused therapy is, if something is working, do more of it (De Shazer & Dolan, 2012). Solution-focused therapy can be counted amongst postmodern therapies (Jones, 2012) that employ language to utilise existing experience or creative potential to enable the emergence of new ways of being (Trepper, et al., 2010). Solution-focused therapy is different from traditional psychotherapeutic or mental health approaches that are based on problem solving. Solution-focused Therapy only deals with past failings and problems to the degree necessary for empathising with the client's distress (Trepper, et al., 2010).

Some of the key solution-focused therapy tenets are:

- Therapist encourages clients to increase the rate of existing useful behaviours

- Impasses do not exist all the time, exceptions are usually present that can be embellished to co-construct solutions (De Shazer, 1991)
- Therapists co-construct with clients new ways to deal with existing unwanted forms of behaviours and thinking that are sourced from the clients' inventory of workable solutions (Berg, 1994)
- Unlike skill-building and behaviour approaches, solution-focused therapy assumes that clients already engage in solution behaviours and have answers to their problems
- Promotes the attitude that minor changes in behaviour can lead to significant change
- Solutions that are discovered in therapy are not inevitably connected to any recognised problem by either the client or the therapist

The expertise required of the clinician is to help the client to establish solutions not to diagnose and treat client problems (Shazer & Dolan, 2012). In solution-focused therapy change will lead to insight far more often than insight will lead to change it therefore paramount to pair articulated solution with concrete behaviours (Erickson, 1980).

Chapter 4: Methodology

4.1-Introduction to Chapter

This chapter relates to the section on experience in Dewey's (1933) developmental spiral as it links the methodology that I used to incorporate parts of my personal experience in regards to self-care with other components of this thesis. The chosen methodology is instrumental in locating the discourses pertinent to my experience of self-care in the personal and subjective. The first section of this chapter outlines why I chose auto-ethnography as the methodology and how it complements the research topic. I discuss epistemological considerations, and in particular how positivistic worldviews are associated with the neoliberal hegemonic discourse, followed by an auto-ethnographic exploration that connects the theory with my personal experience. Next is a discussion of evidence-based research as another device of neoliberalism and how it influences the counselling arena. This is juxtaposed with the solution-focused therapy approach that is based on social constructionist assumptions. The next section introduces auto-ethnography as the chosen methodology. Reference to a number of researchers is used to explain its characteristics and this is followed by three demonstrations of the range of ways that this methodology can assist me as a researching counsellor. In the paragraph on data analysis I outline the specific areas that the chapters on data explore. The final section comprises eight items: auto-ethnography and validity; validity through truth telling; reliability and generalisability; limitations, critique and responses; ethical considerations; informed and voluntary consent; voluntary participation and the right to withdraw without penalty; and privacy and confidentiality.

4.2-Methodology and Epistemological Consideration - my Worldview Determines my Choice of Methodology

In this paper I am not aiming to present knowledge that attains truth by engaging in a cause and effect dichotomy for the reason that I contend that absolute knowledge about an occurrence is unattainable. Nor am I embarking on a fact finding mission while trying to minimise or disguise my subjective worldview with hard data that is based on a line of questioning that is ultimately based on a particular set of beliefs. I like to question assumptions and prefer to think and communicate in terms of an investigation or reflection. My worldview inspired me to choose auto-ethnography because it enables me to probe observations and responses to the world I experience. This is not a static arrangement but is in flux and I may change my outlook in the future. Such an approach is in line with my understanding of the universe and that everything seems to change in a life and death cycle. I believe that individuals, groups, and societies change and constantly construct new realities while old truisms fade into the past. An example of this phenomenon is the rejection of Galileo's celestial theories by the clergy who were functioning as the epistemological gatekeeper in the early 17th century. The intellectual domination by the clergy ended only to be replaced by science as the dominant dogma. Foucault (1982) argues that in modernity "it is the first mode of inquiry to assume the status of science as an attempt to objectify the sheer fact of being alive" (p.777). Most of modernity's institutions use the scientific discourse to assert power and use truth statements that underline the unquestioned authority of science. Aronowitz (1988) describes the apparatus as follows:

In the knowledge hierarchies of post-feudal societies, modern scientific rationality is the privileged discourse, and all others are relegated to the margins. As a result, institutions of the state as well as the economy -- education systems, government bureaus, the law and criminal justice systems -- emulate scientific procedures within the constraints imposed by their own traditions and exigencies. Art and religion hold their places at the margins of human endeavour and become extracurricular, or, to use Freud's term, "deflections," for the frustrations produced by the inhibition of desire by the reality principle (pp. 8-9).

It seems fair to argue that any academic venture is *political* particularly if it is widely disseminated. The dissemination channels are controlled and access is restricted to those who conform to the hierarchies (e.g. temples, universities, governments, and media). Knowledge is a tool to control nominated doctrines that can be declared a truth (e.g. the world is flat) and usually assist a particular group to yield power (in Galileo's case - unquestioned authority of the clergy in questions of epistemology). My reasons for choosing auto-ethnography are also political. It is my expression of asserting power and to create a discourse that assists the development of self-care overcoming hegemonic discourses such as neoliberalism. I fear that humanity has entered a critical time and I need to take a stand against this destructive doctrine that is based on the assumptions of a small number of psychopaths (Curtis, 2007). I reject the idea that we have reached the end of history (Fukuyama, 1992) leaving us stuck with the neoliberal/capitalist doctrine that governs most work places and educational institutions and permeates most aspects of people's lives. Denzin and Lincoln (2009) express a similar observation:

We live in a depressing historical moment, violent spaces, unending wars against persons of colour, repression, the falsification of evidence, the collapse of critical, democratic discourse, repressive neoliberalism, disguised as dispassionate objectivity prevails. Global efforts to impose a new orthodoxy on critical social science inquiry must be resisted, a hegemonic politics of evidence cannot be allowed. Too much is at stake (p.155).

4.3-Hierarchical Spaces – Subservient Research in the Era of Neoliberalism

I am sitting in the University cafeteria and I read about the latest decision to reduce funding for the Arts faculties. I allow myself to feel antagonised. Why are the Arts a less important endeavour than the Sciences or Law? My thoughts cause feelings of discomfort. I start judging the people who made the decisions. "They are a bunch of the neoliberals with agendas underpinned by a positivistic worldview whilst regurgitating the mantra: 'there is no funding for all this arty stuff,' while lining their own pockets with their inflated remunerations. After discussing these developments with a friend we both comment that those who declare their subjective beliefs as the truth seem to impose their authority on society. This is currently utilised with the financial austerity doctrine based on the premise that there are no funds for certain activities deemed "unproductive" meanwhile banks are bailed out with trillions of dollars of tax dollars (Friedrichs & Rothe, 2014). We conclude that those (us) who question and relativise the truth become the pestering pawns in a system that allows a certain level of criticism as long as it doesn't challenge the power structures that are based on some hocus-pocus.

I am in agreement with Chomsky (Werner, 2009) and Foucault (1982) who suggest that monopolised knowledge dissemination is linked to the concentration of power. I believe that positivistic or postpositivistic methodologies enable the assertion of power by particular groups. It is for this is the reason I have chosen a methodological approach that embraces the subjective and rejects any particular truth claims. I align my approach with the concept of the Austrian philosopher of science Feyerabend (1993) who proposed epistemological anarchism as an epistemological theory that argues that there are no useful and exception-free methodological rules governing the development of science. He argued that the idea that science could, or should, operate according to universal and fixed rules is unrealistic, malicious, and unfavourable to science itself. The delusion that the superiority of particular theories or scientific results are responsible for scientific advance is another reason for me to use auto-ethnography, because it does not aim to become part of such an endeavour. Kuhn (1962) argued that the concept of scientific truth, at any given moment, cannot be founded on objective criteria but is devised by a consensus of a scientific community that holds a position of power within the system. Conflicting paradigms are often incommensurable because they are opposing versions of the truth which cannot be comprehensibly resolved. Kuhn concluded that overall science in its endeavours can at no time depend fully on objectivity but must also consider subjective viewpoints. He alleges that all objective assumptions are ultimately based on subjective conditioning, worldviews, or vested interests. Kuhn's hypothesis also had a profound effect on the social sciences of the mid-twentieth century that were largely influenced by empiricism (Novick, 1988). Bauman also critiqued institutionalised positivism or the thinking in absolutes as follows:

Our innate tendency to express moral concern and identify with the “other’s” wants is stifled in modernity by positivistic science and dogmatic bureaucracy. If the “other” does not “fit in” to modernity’s approved classifications, it is liable to be extinguished (Bauman, as quoted by Scott, 2007, p.19).

What is involved in being extinguished by the gate keepers if one does not fit into the approved classifications? Who has control of the instruments to wipe people out, literally or figuratively? Whole societies, cultures, and races have vanished or are disappearing, assimilated in the globalised utopia of neoliberalism (Levene & Conversi, 2014). Education and academia are also part of this endeavour by sifting those out who may challenge the established order:

The whole educational and professional training system is a very elaborate filter, which just weeds out people who are too independent, and who think for themselves, and who don't know how to be submissive, and so on -- because they're dysfunctional to the institutions and the system (Chomsky, 2013, p.111).

I believe that this selective or pseudo-competitive process to which Chomsky refers also promotes elitism, by endorsing the followers and sifting out those who challenge the status quo or who simply see it for what it is: someone’s particular idea of how things should be. What remains is a set of values imposed by agents of the elite backing their own epistemological or political agendas.

4.4-Dominant Research Approaches in the Counselling Arena

Where are research and theory located in the counselling arena? Holmes, Murray, Perron, and Rail (2006) assert that the rigorous move towards evidence-based research in the

health sciences is a manifestation of the exclusive use of postpositivism as the epistemological approach.

The pervasive medical model prefers manualized treatments for DSM [Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders] diagnoses to therapeutic relationships with unique humans. The evidence-based practice movement highlights the evidence in favour of specific treatments and downplays the evidence for the curative powers of the human clinician (and patient)... The ongoing march toward evidence-based practices tends to neglect the human dimension of the practitioner and the psychotherapy (Norcross & Guy, 2007, pp. 4-5).

I see the almost exclusive use of evidence-based research practice as an indication for the establishment of a one-size-fits-all doctrine to enforce free market quality control mechanism to fit human services into capitalist profit thinking (Yeoman, 2012). Interventions based on evidence-based research are part of the funding stipulations of most health providers and have caused a shift towards postpositivistic or positivistic research (Holmes, Murray, Perron, and Rail 2006). Rather than risk being alienated from their contemporaries, many researchers find themselves manipulated by the dominant research discourses and come to discount most other research discourses (Holmes, et al. 2006). Unfortunately, privileging a single discourse situated within a single scientific paradigm (postpositivism/positivism) confines the researcher to a yoke of exactly reproducing the established order (Holmes, Murray, Perron, & Rail, 2006).

4.5- The Individual is the Expert of their Self-care Research

The learnings I had in counselling education do not promote the idea that a particular theory of counselling is superior, regardless of the dominance of evidence-based research. Counselling theories evolve and ideally need to match the needs of the clients and counsellors often choose an eclectic approach that integrates a number of techniques (Jones-Smith, 2012). One of the theories that resonates with me is solution-focused therapy – a theory that turns the idea of the all-knowing specialist on its head. It is based on social constructionism philosophy and proposes that clients be regarded as the experts in their own lives and find ways to overcome their own problems with the assistance of the therapist (Berg, 1994). If I transfer this notion into the setting of the theme of this thesis it would mean that I am the expert of my self-care exploration and the accompanying mental processes. My readers are also experts for their own self-care needs and may find additional meanings within this research. To explore my understanding of self-care, the best fitting methodology is auto-ethnography because it embraces and foregrounds the researcher's subjectivity rather than attempting to limit it. Above I have pointed out some of the dialectical considerations that have influenced my choice to use a qualitative approach that embraces the personal and subjective over the impartial and objective. Furthermore I endorse the view that “concentrating on dichotomies is counterproductive, given that auto-ethnography by definition operates as a bridge, connecting autobiography and ethnography in order to study the intersection of self and others, self and culture” (Ellingson & Ellis, 2008).

4.6-Introduction of Auto-ethnography

This auto-ethnographic study involves critically compiling, resourcing, and documenting a number of personal stories, diaries, pictures, and memories that fit into researching a *journey of self-care* that begins in my childhood and arrives at the present time working as a counsellor. In this chapter I locate my auto-ethnographic project at the intersections of a set of literatures on auto-ethnography and how it relates to the subject of self-care as counsellor. I suggest that establishing good self-care is a balancing act and finding a fitting formula is a subjective enterprise. This is the reason for choosing auto-ethnography because “the failure to consider the individual motives, needs, and vulnerabilities of psychotherapists renders much of the well-intended practical advice on self-care hollow and general” (Norcross & Guy, 2007, p.4). Every person’s experience is different. Although there are trends and similarities I could compile, my main emphasis at this point is to explore my own assumptions grounded in my personal history and to link them with the topic. In addition, I question some of the co-existing societal and political conventions. I interchange the *other* and the *self*, study the mutual structures, and propose ways to identify and empathise with each other (Behar, 1996; Pelias, 2008) all the while crafting a narrative that induces change (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010; Day Sclater, 1998 as quoted in Haynes et al., 2014).

4.7-Voices about Auto-ethnography

Heider originally introduced the term auto-ethnography in the mid-1970s when doing a study of the Dani people in Papua New Guinea (Chang, 2008). There are no clear definitions available for the term auto-ethnography, and it is sometimes used instead of self-ethnography,

reflexive ethnography, performance ethnography, and can also be associated with narrative inquiry and with autobiography. In the 1970s, auto-ethnography was more precisely demarcated as "insider ethnography", denoting studies about the culture of a group of which the researcher is a member (Hayano, 1979). Today auto-ethnography is wide-ranging and open-ended methodology including a wide range of practices (Ellingson & Ellis, 2008). Two types of auto-ethnography have lately been described: the *analytic* and *evocative* type. The analytic type concentrates on "developing theoretical explanations of broader social phenomena, whereas evocative auto-ethnographers focus on narrative presentations that open up conversations and evoke emotional responses." (Ellingson & Ellis, 2008, p. 445) Another researcher, Maréchal (2010) asserts that, "auto-ethnography is a form or method of research that involves self-observation and reflexive investigation in the context of ethnographic field work and writing" (p. 43). Ellis (2004) explanation of auto-ethnography as a method is that it explores the concept of personal and psychological change by using a range of personal historical material. It also connects the material to events in society with the hope of both encouraging increased awareness for the scholar and reader, as well as social and personal change. Behar (1996) believes that auto-ethnography "occupies an intermediate space we can't quite define yet, a borderland between passion and intellect, analysis and subjectivity, ethnography and auto-biography, art and life" (p. 174). Ellis (2004) describes auto-ethnography as a style of research and writing that links autobiographical experiences to social, cultural, and political theories. It is an emergent methodology and is useful for surfacing knowledge that is not part of the dominant discourse. The purpose of auto-ethnography is to author evocative accounts of one's experiences that draw from life's rich range of emotional and sensory

experiences in ways that matter and make a difference (Ellis, 2004; Ellis & Bochner, 2000). The advantage of auto-ethnography is the way it enables explorations of such a personal nature that may offer insights into problems that have been overlooked in other cultural contexts. Themes such as the nature of self, race, sexuality, child mistreatment or, as in my case, self-care practices of a counsellor, are explored from the perspective of the researcher being the concerned subject. In addition to helping the researcher make sense of his or her individual experience, auto-ethnographies are political in nature because they engage their readers in important political issues and often ask us to consider things, or do things differently (Chang, 2008). Jones in the *Handbook of Autoethnography* gives the following description of this method:

It is not simply a way of knowing about the world; it has become a way of being in the world, one that requires living consciously, emotionally, and reflexively. It asks that we not only examine our lives but also consider how and why we think, act, and feel as we do. Autoethnography requires that we observe ourselves observing, that we interrogate what we think and believe, and that we challenge our own assumptions, asking over and over if we have penetrated as many layers of our own defenses, fears, and insecurities as our project requires. It asks that we rethink and revise our lives, making conscious decisions about who and how we want to be. And in the process, it seeks a story that is hopeful, where authors ultimately write themselves as survivors of the story they are living (2013, p. 10).

My particular auto-ethnographic account is concerned with how personal narratives can assist me to question historical ways of defining my way of practicing self-care. The scripting (graphy)

of my own/self (auto) history meets the culture (ethno), specifically that of a young person growing up in postwar Germany, then as a new immigrant to New Zealand working as a self-employed tourism operator and now, in the present, as a counsellor working in various settings (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Reed-Danahay, 1997). I have selected a number of significant parts of my history and present these to explore how these constructs influence my ability to care for myself and work as a counsellor.

In summary auto-ethnography allows me to:

- understand and accept myself more deeply (as a researcher and counsellor), while delivering an evocative narrative to readers in my own pursuit for subjective and universal understanding
- formulate my text in a style that provokes emotion, reaction, and additional learning for self and readers as a means to make a difference personally, in the field, and globally
- communicate the continuing process of the research phenomenon, as an alternative to glimpses of results. These subjective accounts are often uncompleted, and invite personal interpretation and exchange with others
- communicate meaning and encourage continuing dialogue rather than just portray a phenomenon (Ellis & Bochner, 2000).

4.8-Subjective Concepts of Time and Space in Auto-ethnographic Research

There are multitudes of influences that I am exposed to from moment to moment; experiences with people in multitudes of settings influence me to exist as the person and counsellor I am, or will, become. Decisions and behaviours are shaped by this context, bringing

the past into my engagements in the present. By reconsidering old material, memories or events that I engaged with years ago I am able to perceive new perspectives and fuse them with present ones. It is like a musician who uses a very old song, changing some of the notes and timing, but remaining within the structure of the original. By doing this I can accentuate particular parts or features to alter the psychological influences and evoke different emotions. I see memories as constructs that are constantly shaped by time and space, like changing melodies that are not rigid and fixed but meandering into the future. The melodies are not replayed in isolation but often with the other, co-constructing the tunes in social settings.

My father's hands of fury

I can recall the dining room and sitting at the table, all my siblings and my mum and dad are there and an invisible dark cloud is hanging over the scene. My father's business is not performing the way he wants it to perform. He asks my mum in a tone of voice that sounds like the distant thunder of an approaching storm: "How much was the take today?" and my mum gives him a figure, with a feeble voice. I remember looking at my father's strong workers hands and how I was sometimes scared of those hands. It was the anger that they could express when they slammed on to the table with their immense power that terrified me. Then, as a small child I compared them to my tiny hands with dismay and thought that my dad's work is an unsafe place, an "angry business" for "angry men". But "seeing" his hands now in my mind, fifty years later, evokes a longing, free of fear. I understand his frustration and anger, after experiencing my own demands in my head about how work or other events should be. I recall how I displayed my anger and frustration, tainting the peace of others. Now while reflecting and composing the multitude of memories can I

visualise my father's hands. I want to touch them again, gently, and say to them that I understand now. Sadness of loss flows through me, knowing that this impossible because he died over five years ago. When sharing this memory with caring people who respond with empathy I am encouraged to change some of the unhelpful narratives that have created suffering and separation in the past.

As an auto-ethnographer I engage with the past and others and transport these occurrences into the present attaching new meanings to events that I would have under other circumstances interpreted differently. Auto-ethnography can radically alter my perception of the past, inform my present, and restyle my future if I am aware and open to the potentially transformative effects. When creating my own narratives, I am often thinking about the time and space influences on my behaviours and actions. The conditions of my earlier life have been restyled and reconstructed many times and my memories are not static but entirely subjective and only an echo of the real events, a renewed interpretation of what has been. I am constantly looking at the past from different perspectives composed of time and space and not in isolation but often with others. Part of the healing potential of auto-ethnography is to find ways to accept what may still cause disruption in my life or in the life of others. This space-time interconnectedness allows change to occur (Rowe, 2009) as a narrative process that involves integrating the old into the new, leading to new behaviours.

4.9-Subjective Categorisation into Negative or Positive Judgments about Reality in Relation to Auto-ethnographic Research

I classify the majority of the events I take part in and observe as either positive or negative in their effect on my mental and emotional wellbeing. This conscious or, at times,

subconscious categorisation is contingent on cultural conditioning and situational. Although other research methodologies may analyse these cognitive processes in particular groups to claim a level of generalisability, my research aims at describing my subjective observations. This process promotes meta-cognitive processing. I can choose to frame formerly negatively framed recollections in a new way (perhaps neither negative nor positive, but as different) to influence my present state of being (e.g. seeing my father not any longer as a threat but as a person who did the best he could at the time while acknowledging some of my grief over him dying). The process is also closely linked to accessing vulnerability and ultimately a level of authenticity that gives the reader a sense of connecting to the person's discussed material. Brown (2010) suggests that vulnerability is the source of social connections and enables us to feel worthy. Communicating without risk or with our defences still intact is most likely ineffective. For this reason this thesis aims at connecting with the reader rather than offering findings with a vast range of data.

4.10-New Perspectives through Reflective and Reflexive Processing

Auto-ethnography encourages me to explore my past and make sense of the way I use a constant flow of memories to influence my existence in the here and now. For instance my level of self-care is constantly influenced by the past and present judgements. As an auto-ethnographer I ideally assess my past to determine if the behaviour that arises from it does in fact create desirable outcomes or if the way I interact with my past needs adjustment. I suggest that auto-ethnography functions well within the context of Dewey's developmental spiral (1933) and supports reflective practices.

4.11-Data Collection Procedures

The data collection procedures for this auto-ethnographic research study involved using photographs, poems, letters, emails, journals, and reports of my personal experiences across a range of settings. They also include my experiences, growing up in a family in postwar Germany; immigrating to New Zealand; operating a business; recent postgraduate studies towards a Master of Counselling; working in a men's prison as a drug and alcohol counsellor with mandated clients within a therapeutic community; and working in a community counselling centre. The data cover a time period of fifty years. I chose this time span to collect material because I suggest that the way I conduct self-care and how I balance life and work is founded partially in my past. Established auto-ethnographers suggest that the study should be conducted in a manner that strives to better understand the self and personal experience and how the effects of that past play out in the here and now (Ellis, 2004). I have collected reflective notes in various social settings and scenarios that illuminate some of the mental processes that create emotions, behaviours, and reactions. For instance: How did I feel when my boss asked me to do another task or another client turned up when I am just about to walk out the door to head home? What kind of thoughts shape my conduct in these moments and where do they originate? Do I say *yes* or *no* to these demands that prevent good self-care? Do I blame others for my inability to say no or do I say yes to keep the peace? Where do obligation, self-regard, and pleasing originate? How do I balance these situations that occur on a daily basis and can lead to either harmony or conflict with a number of people who play important roles in my life? Where does the sadness, anger, or joy originate from when I uncover some of the emotional

layers of wanting to please people versus looking after my own needs? When use this information how does it connect to some of the historical material from my childhood or earlier work life? How did my parents look after themselves and balance work life and private life? What was the collective consciousness that dominated postwar Germany when I grew up? How do political and economic circumstances influence my self-care?

4.12-Data Analysis

My goal with this research is not to arrive at a specific finding or absolute truth on the subject and besides I do not think that I would ever be able to achieve that, which is one reason I chose auto-ethnography. This research is about my personal process and how it connects with my environment. It is not intended to provide proven results on mechanisms that add to or reduce levels of self-care. My aim is to generate significant clarification about self-care that will make a contribution not only to the field of counselling but also to other fields. I consciously analyse my data, avoiding being vague. When analysing the data and literature I seek patterns and reoccurring themes that might help to illuminate my understanding of the way I define and conduct self-care in my unique setting. These include:

- exploring the origins of self-care patterns
- examining past experience with burnout, vicarious traumatisation and compassion fatigue
- exploring literature on self-care for counsellors and therapists or other helping professionals using my theoretical lens (social constructionism) to discuss the discourses

of awareness/self-awareness, wellness/un-wellness, work ethics and self-care linking them to my assumptions and experiences

- recognising, through contemplation about my history, assumptions, interactions with organisational structures and discourses ways to increase self-care practices through building heightened awareness of hegemonic discourses and power relations
- utilising these discoveries as a tool for intervention that will benefit my own and others' practice.

4.13-Auto-ethnography and Validity

In quantitative research, validity questions if the conducted research measures what it intended to measure. However, as a qualitative method, auto-ethnography is very different from other types of quantitative studies because validity cannot be obtained through the mathematical analysis of results. Instead my work seeks authenticity through other means, processes that Ellis (2004) describes as “narrative truth”, for instance by evoking in readers a feeling that the experience described is lifelike, believable, and possible. Research can also become valid because it helps the researchers and readers communicate with others different from themselves while offering ways to improve their lives (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Furthermore auto-ethnography also contests the traditional social scientific approach that highlights the principles for quality or validity in social research. Richardson (1997) uses the metaphor of a crystal to deconstruct conventional validity. She proposes that a crystal has an immeasurable number of shapes, dimensions and angles, functions as a prism, and transforms its form, but it still has structure. Lather (1993) suggests oppositional approaches to the established regime of

validity in order to break it up and further different political agendas. My research questions the current societal norms for the constructs of work-life and self-care using my experiences and aims at creating a critical political agenda. The rigour and validity of this study relates to assembling a discourse that challenges the neoliberal construct of denying effective self-care of the subject and instead shaping a discourse that does.

4.14-Achieving Validity through Truth Telling

My research deals with personal recollections and narratives that shaped my perception about self-care as a counsellor, balancing my work and personal life in my unique way. The main thrust of this study comes from doing rigorous self-examination without shying away from the deeply personal. My aim is to be honest in this self-inquiry as I believe this is closely related to the validity that I seek, even if that means to disclose thoughts and behaviours that are not necessarily agreeable to society. Zuroff and Blatt (2006) suggest that in terms of being true to the methodology it is impossible to know what will be discovered, until it is discovered because the findings and important issues develop as the researcher proceeds. The process may then lead to other points of interest. If I want to discover the meanings surrounding self-care as a counsellor, I need to be prepared to find that my research discovers totally different results from those I anticipated when I began the investigation – even if it challenges long held beliefs and behaviour patterns. As an auto-ethnographer I aim for what Ellis (2004) describes as “narrative truth”. I am declaring that the data of this research – the emotions, cognitive processes, concepts, predictions, and so forth are to the best of my knowledge honest. This study is meant to have an impact on me as person, researcher, and therapist and is meant to

increase my understanding of how I am relating to the subject of self-care and how I might become aware of way to improve it. This does not happen in isolation but within the environment, the relationships with other professionals in my field but also my family and friends. Ultimately, I am questioning my position within the domain I am living in and how I perceive myself within this world. Through my example, this research is conducted to give the reader a chance to explore ways to examine the subject, to inspire, provoke and invite them to empathise with my struggles, hopefully enabling them to link my accounts to their own. Over the past months, I have shared with other therapists, friends and family my idea for this research and a number of them have asked to see my completed work. If those people who engage with this thesis including myself draw new conclusions or take from it new approaches about how to help themselves and ultimately help others, then, in my eyes, the study is valid.

4.15-Reliability and Generalisability

Generalisability is an essential part of auto-ethnographic research; however it does not occur in the conventional, social scientific sense that the term originates from, and relates to. My study does not involve high numbers of random samples of participants, which is conventionally linked to the assumption that a study is reliable/generalisable and that results can be consistently replicated. Ellis and Bochner (2000) suggest, "we always create our personal narrative from a situated location, trying to make our present, imagined future, and remembered past, there's no such thing as orthodox reliability in auto-ethnographic research" (p. 751). This research is therefore only generalisable and reliable to the degree the reader decides it to be. The readers decide if they feel moved by my accounts and enabled to connect

these to their own lives and also perceive connections to the experiences of others in their environment. Standards of generalisability are established by whether I am able to illuminate (general) unfamiliar cultural processes (Ellis & Ellingson, 2000). My objective is that my readers “provide validation by comparing their lives to [mine] by thinking about how our lives are similar and different and the reasons why, and by feeling that the stories have informed them about unfamiliar people or lives” (Ellis, 2004, p.195). My experience as the author of a personal narrative about self-care is both unique and generalisable to accompany broad themes of the society that I am part of (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). It reflects my individual life experience and reaction to this society and cannot be used by others as a generalisable truth about what it means to find ways to establish better self-care or what my exact experience as a person is. As a counsellor and part of a community, my perspective can produce new meaning about the wider society that I am part of. Readers of my work need to be aware about their reaction to what they read and whether the narrative interest speaks to them about the issue and the cultural setting to which they are also part. I see this research as a stimulus to start conversations about people’s ideas and opinions on the subject of self-care. By starting the conversation about the subject I hope to encourage people to become aware of their own self-care and taking this awareness into their spheres of influence. This process is not easily measurable as it does not fit the traditional cause and effect dichotomy but instead embraces postmodern values. I have adapted assumptions founded on solution-focused therapy as a guideline for the reader:

- the reader is the expert
- readers have all they need to solve their problems

- minor inspirations from this thesis can lead to big changes
- meaning and experience are constructed in context with others
- actions and descriptions are circular
- the meaning of the message creates the response the reader chooses
- any change in how the reader formulates a new goal (solution) and what they do affects future interactions with all others involved
- the solution is not necessarily directly related to the perceived problem
- the language for solution-development is different from that needed to describe a problem
- the future is both created and negotiable
- change is constant and inevitable
- there is not necessarily a logical relationship between the problem and the solution.

(Thomas & Nelson, 2007; De Shazer, & Dolan, 2012; Jackson & McKergow, 2007; Lipchik, 2002)

4.16-Limitations, Critique, and Responses

This thesis is an exploration of personal experience and the influence that a particular construct – neoliberalism – has on my ability to maintain self-care. I acknowledge that there are countless other influences that could be relevant, but that would be beyond the scope of this thesis. Furthermore this thesis is only capturing a moment in time. The statements and conclusions in this thesis are incomplete and formed by my own social situation, interests, agendas, oversights, failings, and subjective worldviews. I am accepting what is largely

unrecognised in more conventional, positivistic, and scientific research methodologies, where the researcher assumes the position of a superhuman entity that can see everything from an elusive position (Haraway, 1991), a position that is supposed to deliver clarity, proof, and, therefore, undisputable knowledge.

Because auto-ethnography does not clearly fit into a category of traditional research methodologies and because it utilises ethnographical and autobiographical approaches, auto-ethnographers are frequently criticised for not fitting into traditional disciplines in the social sciences or performing arts arenas. “Critics want to hold auto-ethnography accountable to criteria normally applied to traditional ethnographies or to autobiographical standards of writing. Thus, auto-ethnography is criticized for either being too artful and not scientific, or too scientific and not sufficiently artful” (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2010). Auto-ethnographies do not and are not capable of delivering outright empirically proven truths. This is the reason why this thesis does not deliver evidence-based methods on how to improve self-care. As I have already noted I have given truthful accounts of my data and that lends this thesis authenticity. This will hopefully inspire the reader to use their own data in comparison to ascertain their own unique results. Another limitation is my own subjectivity, a fact that I am not hiding, but rather embrace, because I believe that my personal worldview, assumptions, and biases are inseparable from the research I conduct. I am the research subject of this study and I am not an objective and unbiased observer of myself. The findings of my research are not intended to set any sort of precedence because self-care and what exactly it is or how to achieve it is difficult to quantify. This is perhaps one reason that there is no literature available with a one-size-fits-all instruction inclusive of all the vital data to underpin such a claim. The charge that auto-

ethnographies are self-absorbed is a point that I think needs to be observed to avoid losing the connection to the world and the people a study should serve. For this reason I chose data that I believe is accessible and inclusive of others to ensure that it will be relevant for a wide-ranging readership.

4.17-Ethical Considerations

A consideration of ethical issues is important and needs to be part of any research when they surface during various stages in the research process. The awareness of ethical issues and concerns has grown considerably in the last decades in qualitative research (Punch, 2013; Hopf, 2004). It is impossible to design ethically neutral research however it is vital to plan an outline that considers the ethical and moral consequences of a project (McLeod, 2011). Some qualitative researchers assert, that there is no single accepted way of doing qualitative research (Snape & Spencer, 2003), and ethical considerations have to be made on a case by case basis and conform to the societal paradigms controlled by various gatekeepers. As a counselling student I want to honour the codes of ethics that I have accepted as part of belonging to professional associations. The New Zealand Association of Counsellor's (NZAC) states: "Counsellors shall protect clients' identities when information gained from counselling relationships is used for purposes such as counsellor training, research or audit." In an auto-ethnographic inquiry others may be mentioned in the narrative, and it is therefore important to construct the narrative in such a way that does not interfere with the codes of ethics that the University of Canterbury or NZAC stipulate. Cases of publications of ethnographic research that allowed the identification of people or communities despite attempts at anonymisation have

caused concern (Flick, 2007). I am a new researcher and used the guidance of my supervisors to negotiate the research process so that the risk to individuals or persons involved in the thesis is minimised.

My research meets the following principles as outlined by the Human Ethics Committee

Guidelines (University of Canterbury, 2014):

- Informed and voluntary consent
- Respect for the rights of privacy and confidentiality
- Limitation of deception
- Minimisation of risk
- Obligations under the Treaty of Waitangi (e.g. considering levels of transparency and consultation if Tangata Whenua will be part of the study or concepts such as postcolonialism or white privilege).

In addition as a member of the professional bodies for counsellors I am bound by the Code of Ethics outlined by New Zealand Association of Counsellor (NZAC, 2012) and Addiction Practitioners' Association Aotearoa-New Zealand (DAPAANZ, 2005).

4.18-Informed and Voluntary Consent

My principle awareness is about not revealing people's or organisations' identities in my narrative. Identities of those who I mention and also any revealing details about the place or context where I have encountered them in are changed to ensure confidentiality. I consulted with my supervisors about any areas that I am unsure about. At the commencement of this project I was not entirely certain where the auto-ethnographic exploration would lead and for

this reason the principle of prior consent was problematic and it was therefore not possible to provide contributors with a complete and full and description of the research at the start. This approach is proposed by McLeod (2011), who suggests that consent is not unconditional and permanent but always subject to continuing negotiation between the researcher and participants. As was required by the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee consent forms outlined the purpose of the study, participant and researcher rights and obligations, and identified the specific section of manuscript participants would be mentioned in. My over-riding concern was to ensure that persons mentioned in the thesis had the option to influence the narrative to satisfy their concerns to ensure that their dignity remains intact. This process was conducted again with my supervisor when the thesis was edited prior to submission for examination.

4.19-Voluntary Participation and the Right to Withdraw Without Penalty

Persons who did not grant their permission to be included in the auto-ethnographic research have not been mentioned either directly or indirectly in the thesis. The consent form informed individuals of their right to withdraw at any stage of the process without penalty. The University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee has approved this project: Reference - 2015/25/ERHEC.

4.20-Privacy and Confidentiality

Persons are not identified in the research without their prior consent and participants have the option to use a pseudonym. All individuals mentioned in the narrative have signed a

consent form, acknowledging the precise section of the research they are revealed in. Notes and consents will be kept securely and destroyed within the required time when the research process is completed.

PART 2

Chapter 5: My Problems with Self-care

5.1-Introduction – my Problems with Self-care

The data construction in Chapter 5 links my personal accounts with the discourses of work/busyness, self-care and neoliberalism. I explored work/busyness as coping mechanisms and how they made it difficult for me to practise adequate self-care. This chapter is representing the reflective part of Dewey's (1933) developmental spiral dealing with past experiences. I describe how work/busyness had a particular function in my past, how it shaped my identity, and how it ultimately resulted in burnout. The explorations are problem saturated and reflective in nature and help me to conceptualise the events. I briefly discuss the importance modelling has in establishing hegemonic discourses and then describe how my identity was shaped by the cultural experience and my particular family history and what historical role work played in the formation of these dominant discourses that became internalised truisms that shaped my behaviour. The conceptualisation of how these truisms wielded influence over the shaping of my identity, are based on Foucault's work in particular described in *The subject and power* (1982) discussed in an earlier chapter.

5.2- Noticing the Need for Self-care

As a master's student while working in various settings as a counsellor many questions emerged in regards to self-care. I started to look more closely at myself working in various roles and I noticed I had varying capabilities to deal with the various stresses. It seemed that I was becoming increasingly attuned to recognising what clients needed to change but was sometimes ignorant to my own needs – a prompt to explore this topic. I recalled how I had started to become interested in pursuing a path to becoming a counsellor some fourteen years earlier. I started to ask myself about my ability to maintain a good standard of practice while affected by the day to day stresses, but also the psychological baggage that I carry with me. I was aware that feeling sometimes under par is not necessarily a sign of personal inadequacy but proof that I am human. Even so, as a helping professional I needed to be mindful that compassion fatigue, burnout, and vicarious traumatisation are hazards in my profession. I wanted to increase my ability to notice my own lack, or rather my inability to care for myself, because I have recognised how important self-care is for my practice. My aim has been to research my own truth assertions that created past behaviours and recognise how far these still have sway over my current interactions with my environment. By engaging in ongoing reflectivity I acknowledged my past experiences and responded fittingly when I faced the impact of possible stressors and take a pro-active approach to self-care.

5.3- Positioning my Study - Psychological Baggage (the Path to Burnout)

I immigrated in 1986 at the age of twenty six on my own to New Zealand and started a business in the tourism industry in 1988. Establishing the business was extremely

challenging because the company had very little start-up capital and no assets that could have been used as collateral. This prevented any access to finance from banks. Instead the business was built on a shoestring, and my partner and I worked extremely long hours while raising a young family. The work suited me because it was creative and required a lot of thinking on my feet. After five years of hard work the business started to grow and employed up to twenty employees during the summer. I added to the nationwide tour company by opening a small hostel and I bought a 50 acre life style block. My role in the company changed and I became a manager while the work hours grew even longer, resulting working some days around the clock without any night rest. I took on responsibility for all aspects of the small business from the marketing, sales and plant maintenance, to selecting new staff members. I learned valuable organisational and administrative skills and the business kept growing. After nine years I had a near fatal accident with an excavator when I was clearing an overgrown riverbed on the property that I wanted to transform into an organic orchard. I nearly broke my neck when the excavator rolled down a bank, but this didn't stop me, even though I had a painful splinter of bone pushing into my spinal cord. The pressure of provisional tax bills and the cost of running the business made me re-double my efforts and work harder to keep up with the ever mounting workload. I was compelled to keep going, and I felt responsible for my family and the staff. It was our business and we were proud that we had created something unique and prosperous. Coming from a family who has been self-employed for generations, working harder was a natural progression. I had emulated the work ethic of good German capitalist stock and I had learned the importance of taking pride in my work and even of being defined by it. This work ethic, that I accepted as my own, made me a part of the neoliberal project, becoming a subject that believed in

the market economy, and worked sixty hour weeks without a complaint. All my relationships were determined by the business and its commitments. The business was consuming thousands of litres of fossil fuel and the bank account indicated worldly success. I was behaving like a heart pacemaker for the growth economic model running on adrenalin. After ten years working in the tourism industry I started getting anxiety attacks, not understanding what they were, while continuing the long working hours. After the anxiety attacks faded, a feeling of numbness, a sense of utter disconnection from the world crept all over my being. I wanted to get out and sold the business in an attempt to create change, not realising that the business and work was all I lived for.

5.4 - My Experience with Burnout

I collapsed. My family fell apart, life was empty without the business and the possessions that I had worked so hard to obtain had no meaning any longer. An overwhelming exhaustion started to catch up with me. It seemed "everything" started to disintegrate in front of my eyes, and all the while I was descending into the numbness of a severe depressive episode. I found myself at the bottom of a pit that seemed to close over my head, threatening to bury me alive. My misery was so real that I thought daily about suicide and twice nearly killed myself. I was unable to function or to work for several months. Basic needs like a good night sleep were missing. My bodyweight dropped by a third and severe anxieties prevented me from finding any peace from nagging self-doubt. I was feeling constantly exhausted sleeping an hour at a time only to wake up sweating and having another anxiety attack. My self-worth was at an all-time low, the distressing sense of inadequacy was exchanged with thoughts of hopelessness. After what seemed an eternity I started to

pay attention to the minute details of life - it was like re-learning to live. Making a cup of tea or preparing a sandwich was taking up all my energy but it suddenly had a different quality - I allowed time to experience all these so-called mundanities of everyday life and awarded them new meanings. I felt moments of gratitude. Gradually I started to regain a little more trust that I might be able to cope in the future. A long journey commenced changing and reshaping my identity, I started to learn to look after myself, step by step. I developed an interest in studying how aspects of my psyche work and enrolled in a course for psychodynamic counselling. Whilst recovering I was very careful not to overdo any particular activity. Slowly I rebuilt a life that was making sense knowing that I needed to pay attention to myself and get to know where my limits were. Counselling education taught me about boundaries and how to say no to people. Now fourteen years later I am more aware of where my limits are and have developed a deeper understanding about how the discourses from my past that are shaped by our culture do not necessarily support the process of caring for myself.

5.5-Modelling Leads to Implementation of Truth Statements

Children are learners and imitators (1962, Bandura), and when they see an action or hear a words they often internalise them and they become part of the repertoire ultimately creating personality traits and identity. Children do not question the discourses that they are exposed to but rather they are likely to accept willingly what they learn as the truth (Foucault, 1998). If a child is adopted into a family that is entirely different from its cultural origin it will emulate the new cultural discourses as the norm even if they are deemed outside the norm by

the culture of the child's origin. When I grew up I was exposed to a particular societal setting in a particular culture and era.

5.6-Early Childhood Memories

One of my first memories as a child of three years of age is playing on the beach with a Tonka toy truck. When my mother asked me to come and have lunch, I replied: "I can't, I am too busy, I am working." At the time this statement caused amusement for my parents. How cute the boy is, playing in the sand and thinking he is working instead of playing.

Reflecting now on this utterance while at the same time being aware of the long held belief that I was a highly efficient professional who has burned out in the past, I recognise the underlying truisms. The above utterance is an indication of the truth statements that I internalised at a very early age: Work/busyness is paramount - work overrules all other needs, one doesn't just stop being busy to attend to less important task or needs, such as looking after basic needs or nurturing one self. When I was three, I remember on many occasions I would get so engrossed in being busy that I forgot to urinate and ended up running to the toilet and nearly wetting my pants. I literally forgot myself. Where did I receive the information that determined this behaviour? What was modelled to me? What kind of identities did my parents and culture model? To be able to analyse the emulation of truth statements that lead to assembling identity it is important to consider the historical societal setting.

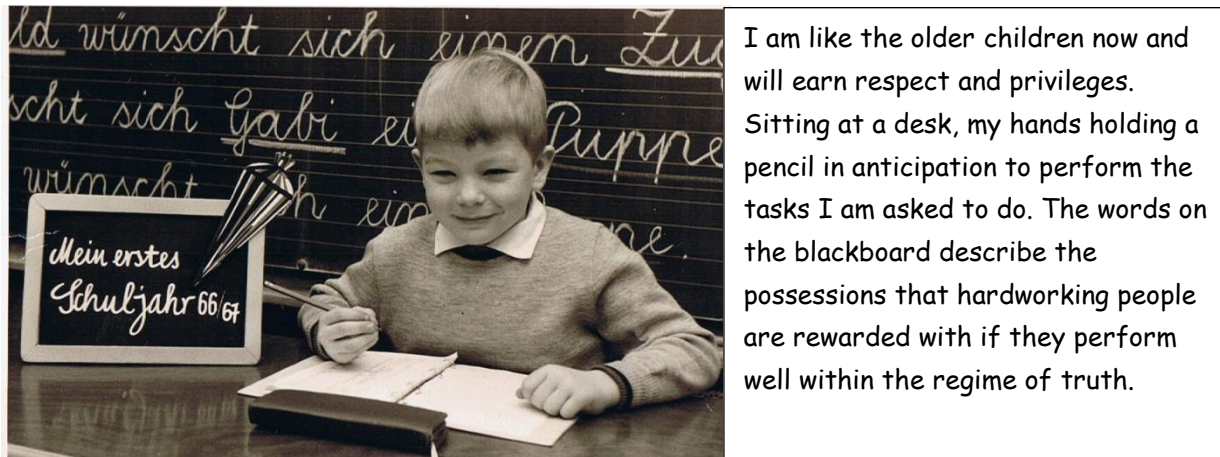


Figure 2: My first day at school (Author's private collection)

5.7-Societal Setting - German Work Ethic in Postwar Germany – the Formation of Work as a Coping Mechanism to Deal with Fear of Death and Trauma

I think of my childhood, the vacant lots of bombed out factories covered in weeds taller than all of us kids. We lived in the city where they used to make the canons and tanks for the total war that destroyed most of Europe and beyond. The remaining ruins of the big war were our playground and the material of our parents' nightmares. Hitler had failed them and now they worked hard to live the American dream. They tried to forget, but the bombs, the death, and destruction were still so vivid so they worked even harder rebuilding the fallen city of Essen and named it: "The shopping city of the West". Ideology was a bad word, but the ruling capitalists were admired with envy. When we grew up we learned about the concentration camps at age eleven. The rattling film reels of the old projector were spewing out horror beyond comprehension. Bulldozers pushing thousands of corpses into trenches waving limply at us, rolling over and over in front of the blade, meanwhile we were sitting silently and shocked in our classroom.



Figure 3: The horror of Belsen (Wikipedia image)

So, that was that nation we were born into, secret mass murderers and millions of bystanders who marched with vigour into the carpet bombing of our liberators. My father had to grow up fast during the war. He was 12 years old when he manned the anti-aircraft gun to defend his home city, cheating death nearly every day. Later after the war he worked to forget... the mangled corpses and the children lynched, hanging from wrecked buildings, because they were too scared to mount the last defence in Hitler's madness. My mum was the same age as my father during the war. She was frail when her world exploded

into a thousand fragments. She hungered for bread, a roof over her head, and safety, and after the war when the horror ended she also worked hard to forget the bad dreams... the dying old people in the bunker, and outside the bodies torn to pieces, of people who hadn't made it when the sirens howled. And I, the child of the survivors learned to cope in similar ways. For years when I felt fear, I worked or busied myself to feel safe; when I felt anger I worked to feel calm, and when I was sad I worked to feel happy.



Figure 4: Aerial view of bomb-damaged residential areas, Essen (LIFE)

My parents were broken and demoralised, part of a physically and psychologically damaged nation (Bessel, 2009). When they emerged in 1945 aged 14, from the ruins of the city of Essen only 13% of the city was left standing. Rarely did they tell me about the horrors of the carpet bombings when they cowered in the bunkers fearing a *volltreffer* (direct hit), nor did they often talk about the hunger and the cold, or of the stench of death that came from the many ruins that surrounded them. But when they talked about what had happened I listened very intently sensing their fear and despair. They had no knowledge of the horrific crimes committed by the Nazis, and were at a total loss that the utopia Hitler had promised them as children, had ended in the widespread destruction of countless countries and the death of millions. The general consensus after the war was to get on with rebuilding and not to talk about the horror because it was too devastating and unconceivable to comprehend. Arendt is notable for her comments on the postwar spirit in Germany: “Everywhere it becomes apparent that there is no reaction to what has happened... and the indifference with which they move through the rubble finds its equivalent in that nobody mourns the dead...This general lack of emotion... is only the most noticeable exterior symptom of a deeply rooted... refusal to confront what has actually happened” (Arendt, 1993, p.24). After the defeat there was little resistance to what kind of political system the victors introduced into the various military zones.

5.8-Troubling discourses – the neoliberal colonisation

Each society has its regime of truth, its general politics of truth; that are the types of discourse which it accepts and makes it function as true, the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is

sanctioned... the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true
(Foucault, 1980, p. 131)

Foucault's (1980) suggestion makes sense when I think about my parents, a generation that created a particular "regime of truth" (p.131). The discourse and the associated work ethos emerged out of the ruins of my parents' childhood and the emptiness of their bellies. Feelings that were caused by traumatic events were mitigated by working even longer hours to build a new life. Work was a form of solace that gave them purpose and direction elevating fear of imminent death and posttraumatic stress. They did not revolt against the new order but produced four children, made money, purchased consumer goods, went on short holidays and worked for 6 days a week from 6 in the morning until 9 at night to pay for it all. Work was not only the means to sustain the family but was what one did without questioning, a way of life and a reaction to the traumatic events of the past. I think I learned from my parents and cultural surroundings to use work and busyness to lessen adverse emotions. I was a child of the German economic miracle that catapulted Germany in to the top five of economic powers in the world by 1965 (OECD, 2014). After the war the western sectors of Germany became a capitalist satellite state that was established by the Allies. The Eastern sector was reshaped by the Soviet Union as a socialist state. A new battle of ideologies - the Cold War - commenced. My parents became economic soldiers and worked hard alongside millions of other survivors to combat the red threat. This was part of a strategy to assure the victory of capitalism and the free world (Curtis, 2007). The new rulers on either side made sure that only compliant governments, media content, and political parties furthered their agenda. These strategies and a renewed militarisation prevented the emergence of any opposition from within that could

have challenged the established system (Burkholz, 2012). The successful ideological colonisation of West Germany after the war became a success and was ultimately instrumental in the fall of the Soviet Union. I suggest that there are parallels between Germany after the war and other countries' neoliberal colonisation. For instance what took place in the 1980s in Chile and Argentina suggests that the proponents of neoliberal discourse use disasters and wars to establish capitalist ideology when populations are too emotionally and physically exhausted to oppose intrusions against their local or national interests (Klein, 2007; Chomsky, 1999). My parents assimilated the new order and modelled it to us. They replaced the terrible past with the promise of a new shining illusion for the future (copied from the American dream via Doris Day and similar constructs). But flaws in their illusion emerged soon enough. My mother had her first psychological break-down in her thirties and suffered severe mental disabilities from her sixties until her death. For most of his life my father was emotionally volatile, abused alcohol periodically, and had numerous periods of suicidal ideation. As I reflect now on my parents' life I think that they were severely traumatised because of what happened during the war. They shaped a life based on the capitalist discourses, but all the while struggling with their demons. Furthermore the traditional small business structures became obsolete under the new free market rules and corporate controlled food distribution soon destroyed the livelihood of their business and most other smaller businesses. I grew up amongst this ongoing angst of my parents' economic survival combined with their untreated posttraumatic stress.

5.9 - Work as a coping mechanism - workaholism

When I was a child I tried to be the fixer and peacemaker, and I worked hard to appease my father's wrath that periodically wreaked havoc in our family. My father's alcoholism and mood swings made my siblings escape but I faced the conflicts and drove myself harder.

I remember I was working in the kitchen cleaning the floor. I heard the key in the lock of the door of our flat. I asked myself if he was going to be angry. My stomach tensed and I felt fear. I quickened my efforts trying to complete the task but I knew it was too late. My father's drunken explosion nearly took the door off the hinges when he smashed it closed behind him. I wanted to run like a small bug trying to crawl into a small crevice but kept cleaning frantically. He leaned into the kitchen and stabbed me with his words: "Mummy's boy is working hard is he, why is the rest of house looking like a pig stay? Where are your siblings?" I responded hardly audible: "I don't know." Then he turned and muttered: "They are useless, lazy lot, all of them." I worked faster and tried to finish the floors and get on to the next chore. It was not a role that I wanted. I behaved like this to be able to survive and make some sort of sense from the chaos and the pain that surrounded me. I made it a habit to hide my hurt with a cheery smile and kept working, instead of thinking about it all. As long I was able to keep busy, I was able to cope. I tried to keep the household running, whilst striving for perfection and being judgemental and impatient with my work. I took on my parents' burdens about their work-life and private struggles, trying to fix it for them. When I was not able to cope with the work load I would collapse and feel deeply ashamed. Once recovered, I would try and do even more tasks to prove to myself that I wasn't lazy and useless. Later in life when in my prime I would work, propped up by caffeine until I collapsed. Similarly in my family of origin I had used work as a coping

mechanism, it damaged my relationships with family members and friends, caused mental instability, caused work-related accidents and illnesses (e.g. cuts, broken bones, burnout, and depression).

For the past twenty years my colleagues and I have studied workaholics and their families at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. Although no formal records are kept on the numbers of workaholics, we estimate from our extensive studies that one-quarter of the population can be classified as workaholic (Robinson, 2007 p.7).

Robinson points out what I have suspected for a long time: I am not alone and work addiction is seen as an acceptable compulsion and fits very well into the neoliberal project. In the past my entire existence was consumed by busyness or creating these elusive measurable outcomes, creating value and competition while attempting to mitigate adverse feelings. Ineffective self-care is, in my case, directly related the enactment of the neoliberal narrative/discourse and I believe that knowing the historical structures will assist me to construct new ways of being.

5.10- Work to What End? – the spirit of Capitalism

Foucault (1991a) suggests that society is controlled by hegemonic discourses by the individual assimilating truth statements as their own and behaving accordingly and enforcing these in their social surrounds. The use of work as coping mechanism and denial of self-care is a fundamental part of capitalism. I am part of an economic system that preaches the gross

domestic product as the measure of quality of life. The taxation system with provisional tax, write-off schemes, and depreciation is geared to create the holy grail of economic growth that disregards the wise and ethical use of human/non-human potential and efficient use of resources (McDonough & Braungart, 2010). An alternative to the economic growth doctrine that promotes ecology and a different set of values seems impossible, and is a challenge to the hegemonic discourse of capitalism and the power structures that have been established (Jensen, 2006). Proponents of capitalism argue that its ideological dominance is inevitable, that it is somehow linked to human nature, an expression of the survival of the fittest linked to the Darwinian discourse of competition and scarcity (McDonough & Braungart, 2010). I disagree with that notion because humans the alleged fittest species, is unable to live in balance with the planet's ecology and destroy the host that sustains the existence of the species (Jensen, 2006). Critics of the growth model assert that our current economic system, paired with globalisation, will ultimately cause a complete collapse of our planet's natural resources and ecology (Meadows, et al., 2004; Jensen, 2006). I used to believe in the economic growth model, using it to cope with trauma or unwanted emotions by working harder and chasing an elusive happiness, building false self-esteem based on status and accumulating material possession. Work-addiction is a dubious coping mechanism that ultimately caused my burnout and prompted me to ask myself where the drive for this behaviour stems from. I think the driving forces of the capitalist work-ethic reach back to the early industrial revolution and possibly further back to serfdom and slavery, shaping a powerful discourse. Benjamin Franklin's description of how humans lived before the introduction of capitalist work ethics, accentuates that humans haven't always lived like slaves and have a choice.

The Indian Men when young are Hunters and Warriors; when old, Counsellors; for all their Government is by Counsel of the Sages; there is no Force there are no Prisons, no Officers to compel Obedience, or inflict Punishment. Hence they generally study Oratory; the best speaker having the most Influence. The Indian Women till the ground, dress the food, nurse and bring up the children, & preserve & hand down to posterity the memory of public transactions. These employments of men and women are accounted natural & honourable, Having few artificial wants, they have abundance of leisure for improvement by conversation. Our laborious manner of life compared with theirs, they esteem slavish & base; and the learning on which we value ourselves, they regard as frivolous & useless. (Franklin as quoted by Edel, 1997, p.34)

When reading Franklin's nearly 300 year old observations about the native tribes of America I am inspired to think about the different cultural existences and how civilisation and its current zenith capitalism seem to offer a life style that, as Franklin puts it, is "laborious" and in the eyes of the natives "slavish and base". I have had years of laborious strife with frivolous and useless learnings that caused me to burnout and collapse when fully engaged in what I now call the absurdity of capitalism. I then believed in the system, in the truth assertions embedded in every dollar that I made. In 1904, Weber in *The Protestant Ethic and The Spirit of Capitalism*, argued that capitalism is not the natural order. He also suggested that the spirit for ongoing capitalism is a matter of values that are disseminated through culture and that as an alternative one could just strive for subsistence, similar to what Franklin described as the way the Native Americans did. Weber asserted that for capitalism to flourish, people have to be assimilated

into and conform to certain discourses. These discourses are not necessarily based on human nature, but rather based on the dissemination of a truth by powerful stakeholders. Capitalism, Weber argues, is not a required progression in the world's history, but was enabled because of people disseminating the related ideology. He suggested that for capitalist societies to appear out of feudal traditionalism, it was necessary to emulate a new set of values (Weber, 1904). These beliefs didn't just materialise out of the economic situation but the beliefs were imagined so that a changed a historical situation was possible, but it too was also just based on a set of values (Weber, 1904).

5.11 - Imagined Horizons

Weber's thoughts are an invitation to allow myself to imagine and to create the society I would like to see to emerge. I refuse to believe that we have reached "the end of history" (Fukuyama, 1992) that capitalism and the so-called liberal democracy is the end-point of humanity's sociocultural evolution. I have a choice to challenge the strategies created by the producers who direct the masses (De Certeau, 1988) with their lies about liberty. Instead I simply plant a garden in a public area and share it with others like Finley did, thus overcoming the illusion of scarcity. I have a choice to question the power assertions dished out by the powerful disseminators and instead become aware of the way I want to use power, thus ending the cycle of abuse of power (Foucault, 1987). I can choose to select consciously the stimuli for my senses that inspire corresponding behaviours, thereby using my learning and development as processes of active construction. I may create providence through creating my own prophecies by being aware that:

Self-efficacy beliefs alter thought processes, the level and persistency of motivation, and affective states, all of which contribute importantly to the types of performances that get realized. In short, performances do not just happen to us we do a lot to bring them about (Bandura, 1990, p. 160).

As Bandura points out beliefs alter thought processes, and, therefore, challenge my beliefs about the hegemonic discourses that I perceived as a hindrance to maintaining self-care I need to bring about specific performances. How to achieve this is outlined in Chapter 6.

Chapter 6: The Solutions

6.1-Introduction

Ko taku reo taku ohoooho, ko taku reo taku mapihi mauria

(My language is my awakening, my language is the window to my soul).

Maori proverb

Language, as the Maori proverb suggests, has power over the physical and non-physical domains. It creates behaviours, feelings, identity, awareness, and attitudes. Solution-focused therapy is an approach that also privileges the power of language (see also Chapter 3.14). The aim of this process is for the therapist and client to shift the focus from the problems (stagnation) to possibilities to find workable ways forward. This chapter is not presenting alternatives to problems mentioned in previous chapters, for example, alternative modes of governing as a response to neoliberalism. Nor will I be able to fix completely my propensity towards the use of busyness or work as a coping mechanism. The aim of this chapter is to create a narrative that will lead me to depart from being immersed in those problems and the accompanying narrative that has previously trapped me in feeling helpless. Instead create a new narrative that supports me to create agency and a sense of coping with the neoliberal constructs as well as to imagine alternative discourses. As mentioned in previous chapters the solutions to a person's problems are subjective, to find a one-size-fits-all approach is a flawed enterprise. This last section of my thesis represents the third part of Dewey's (1933) developmental spiral and describes the conceptualisation or construction of solutions, which

after formation translate into concrete behaviours and enter renewed cycles of reflexion forming a continuing helix that moves into the future.

6.2 – Method

I have structured this chapter similar to a solution-focused therapy session. With the help of a number of colleagues and material from supervisions I assembled a transcript that documents a number of meetings that took place on different occasions. This was done after I had studied, written, and developed the key ideas for this thesis. Because of this the philosophies that have been discussed in earlier chapters permeate the transcripts in this chapter (social constructionism, etc.). All the sections in Chapter 6 have a description of and reasoning underpinning the particular method that is used to help the reader to understand the process. It is also important to note that the sequence of the below listed techniques is interchangeable and can be altered to suit the client or situation (e.g. the scaling questions may be used at the beginning of the process or other components can be repeated to suit).

6.3 -Creating the Point of Departure for the So-called Problems

One of the assumptions of solution-focused therapy is that it is important to work towards not getting stuck in repetitive accounts of the problem, a common adverse coping mechanism that gives the mind the illusion of making sense of a situation. This mind-set is what solution-focused therapy practitioners define as being stuck in a problem saturated state. This mentality is often an automatic response and may be caused by deeply ingrained truth statements that may not enter the conscious thinking processes. To overcome this, solution-

focused therapy practitioners suggest breaking down the issues and only dealing with one problem at a time, while seeking realistic outcomes (Macdonald, 2011). This approach can also be seen in the context of disrupting the problem narrative enabling the client/practitioner team to shift the focus from switching between different aspects of the problems. In my case for the purpose of working towards solutions, I reduced the complexity of my problems as follows (point of departure): Feeling threatened by the neo-liberal/capitalist hegemony whilst using work and busyness as an unwanted coping mechanism to deal with uncomfortable emotions produced by aforementioned discourse, which prevented good self-care.

6.4 –Questions and Answers about the Problem and Developing the Goal

Solution-focused therapy practitioners aim to support clients, who have specific questions, to achieve what they would like instead of the problem (goal). Often clients will describe the goal as a negation of the problem or as wishing that the problem is absent, or lessened. Although the client's responses to questions about a problem can give the practitioner clues about existing exceptions to the problem, the counsellor will ideally steer the session away from what is not working towards an achievable goal. The questions below are derived from De Shazer, Dolan et al., (2012) and incorporate the aim of advancing cognitive processes towards finding more satisfying outcomes that lead to an established goal.

Practitioner: What do you enjoy?

Me: I like going for long walks with my wife, gardening, having meals with my family, lying in the sun, reading, having friends over and talk, working with students, fixing or building things around the house, riding my bike around the hills...

Practitioner: Great, that sounds like you are very capable and enjoying your life with special people around you. You said that you are enjoying working with students – what work is that?

Me: I work as a counsellor at a high school.

Practitioner: That sounds interesting – that you are doing all these things that you mentioned and also work in that capacity. Please tell me what does it take to do be good at that?

Me: I think it is important to be able to listen carefully, be empathetic, enthusiastic, open, respectful, kind, clear, reflexive, and genuine. Make students feel safe and invite them to create what they want to create in their lives and show an interest in what that is.

Practitioner: Wow that sounds like you have a lot of different skills the students will benefit from. I am wondering about what are your best hopes from us working together here today?

Me: To become more capable to maintain good self-care and feel less threatened by the neo-liberal/capitalist hegemony. I would like to use different ways of dealing with my helplessness facing social inequalities and not use work and busyness to deflect feeling fear and frustration.

Practitioner: What would you like to achieve in regards to maintaining good self-care and what feelings would you prefer to feel?

Me: I would like to believe that my work makes a difference in my client's life and find balance so I maintain self-care because that will enable me to work effectively and improve my resilience. I want to feel more often peaceful and excepting of the social situations but continue to advocate for the vulnerable.

Practitioner: Great, it sounds like you are very clear what you would like to achieve, let's find out what you have done in the past that helped you to achieve your goal.

6.4 i - Finding exceptions to the problem.

Therapists spend most of the session listening attentively for talk about previous solutions, exceptions, and goals. When these come out, the therapist punctuates them with enthusiasm and support. The therapist then works to keep the solution-talk in the forefront. This, of course, requires a whole range of different skills from those used in traditional problem-focused therapies. (De Shazer & Dolan, 2012, p.9).

Exploring exceptions to the problem or ways the client has coped in the past with the issue can awaken the client to the fact that they already possess the ability to create the change they desire.

Practitioner: What did you do, think or say in the past that got you closer to achieving your goal?

Me: I remember the first time I shifted my perspective was in my mid-twenties. I started to question my actions and the involvement in particular activities or situations and why I thought I had to do them. I thought about some of the ways I allowed society to influence my behaviours and my identity. I started to challenge the urge to be busy, or to compensate unwanted emotions with busyness. I remember lying in bed in the mornings and fighting the urge to get up and do things. Instead I just lay there and waited until I didn't feel any guilt or compulsion. I started to become aware of my need to slow down and reflect. In the last decade I started to use mindfulness exercises, breathing exercises, yoga, walking and cycling.

Practitioner: This is really good material and it sounds like you are quite clear about what you would like instead of getting stressed about the problem. What else have you done in the past that made the problem somehow better?

Me: I read philosophy written by people who thought about these problems and who offer alternatives of how to live differently by becoming aware of the underlying causes of the interaction between society and the individual. For instance Foucault suggests that a powerful discourse operates on the subject through the internalisation of truth statements. By becoming aware how I award certain discourses power I can reject them and diminish the power they have over me.

Practitioner: That sounds very intriguing. What does that look like in your daily life, what actions do you take because of this knowledge?

Me: I stopped watching TV about 20 years ago and have no desire to expose my senses to this form of media and the discourses that are proclaimed by people who are usually closely aligned with the establishment. I also restrict my access to news coming from print or the Internet, which is the only form of media that I use these days. This creates more time for other more enjoyable activities. Another contributor is being able to have strong boundaries and diminished sense of dependency. For instance, I am now in a position to work part time because I don't spend much money on consumer goods and I am debt-free. In the workplace if the organisation is not showing enough care towards staff and I am unable to change the culture, I will leave. For me it is important to be able to say no to unreasonable demands from the organisation I am working for.

Practitioner: That sounds great and you are saying it works well. What else have you done in the past that made the problem somehow better?

Me: I have utilised the knowledge from philosophers whose theories had an impact on me. For instance DeCerteau's thoughts resonate with me, I find them empowering. He suggests that every action, even the most mundane, can become an act of resistance to the hegemonic discourse. For instance I like gardening and have planted on purpose a number of fruit trees in public spaces. This means this practice of everyday life becomes an act of defying the neoliberal construct of profiteering. I create language, meanings, and imaginations that create a different state of being with these simple actions. Like stones that are cast into a pond these actions creates ripples that converge and become an ongoing motion supporting the emergence of different discourses. I find that empowering and helping me to feel hopeful instead of helpless in the face of the hegemonic neoliberal discourse.

6.4 ii - Establishing how client coped before commencing therapy.

Just like a client who seeks out a therapist I am dealing with a problem in this thesis that I would like to shift. I have not always had the problem occurring at the same strength or intensity. I tried to solve the problem before I started writing the thesis and I am also aware that it is an ongoing process of adjusting to ever changing circumstances. As Beyebach et al. (1996) suggest people often make changes before seeking out a therapist, or as in my case writing a thesis. When thinking about the time before I started writing this thesis and making an attempt to shift away from the problem, there were times when the problem wasn't as intense.

Practitioner: What did you notice for the better or the worse before you decided to take action and come to see me?

Me: Taking care of my self has become easier since I started to do personal development work in various settings and using different tools that enabled me to become aware of my thoughts and how they manifest in my life. For instance cognitive behavioural therapeutic approaches introduced the notion of meta-cognition. I developed the ability when triggered by an event to monitor the self-talk that my mind generates and verify if it is helpful to think in a particular way. In retrospect the teachings of Gautama conveyed in a ten day silent retreat (Vipassana) made a big difference in my ability to take care of myself. The retreat enabled me to feel very peaceful and alert to my inner voice. Every sensation was amplified, prominent and remained often in a preconscious state without explanation or association. This state made it easier to focus on the moment and what it was presenting. It also increased my sense of gratitude that I felt, even for the mere fact of being alive. The expectations I use to ponder how reality should look like diminished. I started to accept disappointment, pain, and discomfort, which enabled me to become more peaceful.

Practitioner: I am very glad to hear about the multitude of measures that you already established as methods to deal with the problem even before you decided to work further on this problem! It sounds like that you have not only thought about the problem but more so about how to move forward.

6.5 - Setting Measurable Goals

To create measurable and behaviour based goals it is important to pursue detailed and pertinent explanations of the desired outcome. For instance, it is not realistic to overcome complex problems by having the goal to win a lottery. It is advisable to ask what the client will be doing, not what will have stopped or vanished that will lead to achieving the preferred state.

Practitioner: What will it be like when the problem has been solved?

Me: I will have the sense that what I am doing in my job and my private life makes a difference to others whilst taking care of myself.

Practitioner: What else will you be doing?

Me: I may use De Certeau described tactics to overcome the structures set out by the producers by using an electric vehicle avoiding the use of fossil fuel for instance. Other tactics may be developed by discussions with others who may join me and set up a solar-powered charging point utilising social constructionism in the process. I would use ongoing reflection of researching alternatives to the status quo by applying Dewey developmental spiral as an ongoing method to find solutions. I want to maintain self-care and resist my internal and external demands falling victim to power assertions that Foucault discussed while modelling this behaviour to others. I want to choose to focus on what is in plain view and use my language like an instrument of the imagination as Wittgenstein suggested.

Practitioner: When that happens, what difference will it make?

Me: That will mean that I will be able to feel a sense of agency in overcoming the overpowering politics whilst working towards establishing new solutions by developing de-centralised power

structures, that De Certeau wrote about. I will talk to others about the changes in society we would like to have happen in the future encouraging others to fight for their rights. I want to be an example for resisting the neoliberal hegemony by developing effective self-care.

Practitioner: How will other people notice that things are better for you?

Me: They will see me maintaining my boundaries at work or elsewhere when I will say no. People will comment on how well and relaxed I look. They might say: “You look really happy and content.” Or clients might say: “I have noticed that you have a positive outlook.” Friends will notice that I will have constructive ideas about the changes I want in society versus talking about the problems. For instance, I will participate actively in a political party that opposes the current system.

Practitioner: What else will be different?

Me: I will be aware of the truth assertions informed by the neoliberal constructs that affect my life (Foucault, 1992) and will change my behaviour accordingly. Instead of consuming goods that may be forcibly marketed and supplied to the market by multinational corporations, I will buy locally made goods.

Practitioner: What else?

Me: I want to acknowledge that even the smallest step towards resisting the status quo is a step in the direction I want to move towards to. I will be able to relax and enjoy periods of time when I am totally idle without feeling the need to get busy and not feeling like I should be doing things. I will be able to just be.

Practitioner: What will be your goal for the future that incorporates some of these methods of being that you described?

Me: My goal is to accept the enormity of the hegemonic discourse neoliberalism, while resisting it and establishing the best self-care without resorting to using work/busyness as a copying mechanism to deal with unwanted feelings or events. I would like to change my state more quickly when I notice I am getting entrapped and find peace when the urges of busyness and restlessness become apparent. I want to engage in a chosen activity fully present and the emotions/sensations that I perceive, without the demand shaping in my head that it should be somehow different.

6.6 - The Miracle Question

Uttering a word is like striking a note on the keyboard of the imagination (Wittgenstein, 1956, p. 6).

Wittgenstein inspires me with his metaphor, that finding solutions to a problem can be realised through using language as an instrument of the imagination. The miracle question is an encouragement to use one's imagination. The aim of solution-focused therapy is to use this powerful tool to assist the client to imagine how things would be if the problem is diminished or vanished, when they start afresh on a new day in a new reality. It also helps to formulate goals and allows for incremental progress towards a desired state. Very differing responses to the question may emerge and some clients may remain silent or hesitate to respond. In most cases, given enough time to envisage a different reality, they will come up with results.

Responses that emerge from the miracle question are co-constructed with the practitioner and can often be treated as the goals of the session if these have not emerged by this point. The client may answer with comprehensive descriptions of how reality could change, deliver

enriched meanings about exceptions, and be solution linked to behaviours that may have worked in the past or bring about the desired goals.

Practitioner: Imagine a miracle happens tonight while you are asleep, and your best hopes are being realised, but because you are asleep when this miracle happens you do not know it has happened, so when you wake in the morning, what will be the first thing that you notice, when you think or say yeah, something is different – the problem has gone?

Me: I think I would wake up and feel really refreshed and relaxed. I will just lie there in bed and take my time; I might look for a while out the window or be with my spouse. I will feel like I have enough time and there is no hurry to go anywhere.

Practitioner: And what else would you notice?

Me: My mind would be at ease. I would feel a deep sense of acceptance. I would think one thought and let it pass and then the next and notice that those thoughts are part of why I am at ease. I would have no demands on myself or others but just let time pass and inhale deeply and feel content with what is happening right in that moment. (Pause)

Practitioner: Suppose you were able to do all this, what would be different after the miracle...that will tell you: “Yeah, this is different, my mind is at ease, thoughts are passing one at the time, no more demands on myself or others, just letting time pass and breathing deeply feeling content with this moment?”

Me: I would feel gratitude for just being alive and able to perceive all these sensations. My desires would be uncomplicated allowing me to focus on what is happening in the moment. I wouldn't feel anxious or scared of not fulfilling some obscure task or duty. After starting the day in that way I would not get stressed but attend to the various tasks with the sense that I am

doing the best I can without compromising myself in the process. I would know that I am enough, that I am wanted and valued by others and love myself for who I am.

Practitioner: Sounds great the way you see self-care manifesting in your life after the miracle has taken place.

6.7 - Scaling Questions

Independently of me formulating goals at the beginning or in response to the miracle question the next part of the solution-focused therapy approach is for me (client) to gauge my progress in establishing the desired change. Scaling questions are an important tool to support the emergence of a solution saturated construct. This device also enables the client/clinician team to scaffold the goals towards less intimidating, manageable, increments. Scales are suppositional, theoretical and can therefore be less threatening if the clients are daunted by the actual emergence of their goals. It gives the practitioner/ client team an immediate, practical tool to measure progress towards the desired outcome (Macdonald, 2011). Scales also increase clarity of communication with other professionals who may be involved with the client. The scale is determined as follows:



Figure 5: Problem scale

1 7 10

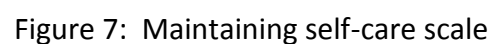
1 = Feeling threatened by the neo-liberal/capitalist hegemony while using work and busyness as an unwanted coping mechanism to deal with uncomfortable emotions produced by aforementioned discourse preventing good self-care.

10 = maintaining good self-care

Me: I think I am sitting on a seven.

How did you achieve that, what has enabled you to score that high on the scale towards achieving your goal of *maintaining good self-care*?

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Practitioner: Great, that sounds excellent and I can sympathise with your sentiments and it makes me wonder what other things you would do when you are a nine on the scale?

6.8 - Conclusion of the Solution-Focused Therapeutic Intervention

This chapter was co-constructed by a number of therapists and the results of various sessions were combined also integrated were the insights from the process of writing this thesis as a reflective process of applying the *conceptual* part Dewey's developmental spiral. The goal of working towards good self-care was achieved. The methods that already worked in the past were accentuated and new ideas as well as the realisation of how to progress contributed to promising descriptions that have enabled me to change behaviours in my daily life. The process was very empowering and changed doubt into assertiveness. I am more confident that I can maintain self-care while exposed to powerful discourses and use my creativity and the assistance of others in an ongoing cycle of transition.

Chapter 7 - Experimentation

7.1 - Fourth Stage in Dewey's Developmental Spiral – Reflexive Practice

"The self is not something ready-made, but something in continuous formation through choice of action" (1916, p.408).

Reflective practice entails continuously experimenting with the result of the reflexive cycle involving contribution and support from others. The final part of Dewey's developmental spiral (refer to Chapter 3.3 for an explanation of the complete process) is to experiment in action with the newly discovered results of a reflective cycle. All actions will lead into renewed cycles of scrutinising my conduct in action while being aware of previous findings. For instance, if I work towards implementing workable self-care in combination with acting ethically in my practice there are a number of elements to consider. I need to be aware of what self-care at this stage in my life necessitates and also what ethical practice means, how it applies when working with diverse clients in ever changing situations and social settings. Perhaps I will experience stressful situations that will compromise my sense of wellbeing and interrupt my best efforts to maintain good self-care. A constant balancing act is required and eventually I need to keep a watch over my capabilities to avoid long-lasting adverse consequences for myself and my clients. By being aware of the discourses that are at work when in action and in how far I am awarding them power over myself or others is fundamental when practising counselling. I want to be aware of how far they are influencing my perceptions and actions. My aim is to focus on cognitive processes and conversations on exceptions to the problem, with the

goal to do less of what does not work and more of what works. The complexities of self-care in the age of neoliberalism as a counsellor require constant adjusting of the new found wisdom in my practice and in my private life to newly emerging situations. This I hope will maintain viable self-care and ethical conduct that is constantly re-evaluated in renewed cycles of reflective processing.

Connections

I am working with 16 men in a drug treatment unit in a prison.

We are sitting in a circle. They are the self-declared waste of our capitalist society - incarcerated, forgotten, angry and sad. Some of them have been subjected to violent abuse since they were born, learning that life is harsh and only sufferable when the senses are dulled with a number of mind-altering poisons. I will not insult them with fancy words or trick them into submission - it needs to be their choice, their process, and their action to alter what is not working any longer and doing more of what is working.

They are the experts of their lives - some of them say they want to walk the talk and I choose to walk alongside them. They speak of support for each other and the whanau on the outside waiting for them. Some remain silent because there is no one waiting, prison is all they know. But they assure each other that they will remember to stay clean and ask for help. I say that I am grateful to be able to be among men who can speak about their strength and weaknesses and how important it is to feel worthy. One man says he feels lighter and safer than before. Another man talks about remembering the things that make him happy. Some of the men smile and perhaps create their own versions of happiness in

their minds. One man talks about how he has learned to accept who he is and that he is good enough even with all his flaws. After a while we all sit silently, breathing, thinking our thoughts, feeling our feelings. The session ends; they all leave the room. I remain in my seat and revisit the session and reflect on what has taken place. I have been true to myself, acted ethically in accordance with my values of loving kindness and most importantly I did demonstrate respect for what was shared. I remain still and breathe consciously and quieten the thoughts, connecting with my body and all the sensations around me. I hear the men in the yard laughing and talking as they slowly walk back to their cells. I turn my attention back into the room, feeling grateful that I am in this moment in this place and remember how scared I was in the beginning to be here with these men. Then my heart was beating so hard that I was worried the men would hear it, I told them that I felt scared and uncertain. After a moment of silence in the room the men started to talk about their fears and how it was for them to be in this room. I connected with these men in that moment, thinking about how it was bonding us to let go and to be vulnerable, trust, show kindness, and compassion while regarding each other as adequate, deserving, grateful, and alive. I think also of those times when there was tension in the room, white-knuckled fury, and some of us held the space and let the angry ones sort it out without their fists and they learned to agree to disagree. We learned together how through being vulnerable we created trust. We realised that the care for the self is essential and the foundation of recovery. Now, I close my eyes and breathe, I access that part in me that is not thought or emotion - I am just existing without demands on reality. A while later when my mind starts formulate language I feel gratitude, I am connected to the essence of my being, that part that is not afraid to let go, moving into the future one heart beat at a time.

7.2 - Hopes for the Future and Sense of Achievement

I hope that readers of this thesis will be able to relate to what has been deliberated in this thesis. The process and subject has taught me how particular discourses have hindered me from achieving desired outcomes in the past. By becoming aware of the mechanism involved I have been able to create new narratives and behaviours. For instance, I have learned to avoid compensating with unhelpful coping mechanisms occurrences that are largely beyond my control. Even if only a handful of people make some positive changes in their lives because of reading this thesis, I believe that my work has not been in vain. This thesis has been very helpful for my practice as a counsellor and the people who have supported me have also benefited in the process. Bringing awareness about self-care to the fore was and is a worthy endeavour that has enhanced the quality of my life. When working now, I am fully aware of my intentions and in how far my self-care influences the effectiveness of my work. I am aware of the problem of the hegemonic discourse of neoliberalism and the way it manifests itself. However, I have chosen to promote different discourses that further my own and others wellbeing in response. I have made it a habit to use Dewey's developmental spiral in my practice and to adjust my behaviours constantly to emerging situations. My work as a counsellor is shaped through the analyses that I do in my field, to deliberate evidence and assumptions, to interrupt habitual ways of operating and thinking, to dissolve conventional familiarities, to re-examine procedures and institutions, and to partake in the development of the political – because political it is, at every turn (Foucault, 1989).

7.3 - Conclusion

“Loving ourselves is the most difficult and courageous thing we’ll ever do”

(Brown, 2010).

My aim with this thesis was to highlight the importance of self-care not only for counsellors but also for all people whatever their background. I believe that caring and loving ourselves is indeed a courageous endeavour and it is an essential trait to be able to function long-term as a counsellor. I have linked some of the problems that I perceived as obstacles to my self-care, and used a number of theories as well as examples from my personal history. I am not offering measurable outcomes but truthful personal accounts employing auto-ethnography as my methodology. This approach is intended to accentuate the fact that the analysis of past experiences and conception of new ways to approach of self-care need to be individually appropriate. Although this thesis explores my own story there will undoubtedly be similarities to other people’s accounts. My wish is that this thesis can be used as a catalyst to increase awareness and to give practical hints on how to implement better self-care whilst becoming aware of the underlying discourses that may drive adverse behaviours. I structured the chapters utilising Dewey’s developmental spiral to demonstrate how his concept can be used within the context of an academic endeavour. I do not promote a particular approach but rather I encourage the creation of new theories or methodologies that are constructed from a multitude of sources. I have suggested in this paper that enquiries do not necessarily have to arrive at a conclusion but can serve a purpose if they invite further discussion and discovery. Essentially I encourage the use of an individually chosen pool of theorists and experimentation

with that pool of knowledge to achieve altered constructs and actions. Once these constructs become reality in practice they can become part of a renewed cycle of reflective practice. In my case, the act of writing this thesis has changed my approach to self-care. I have started to actively and consciously implement self-care and have noticed how these action inspire my colleagues, people in my social sphere, with the ultimate effect of benefiting clients. I see this thesis is a touchstone that furthers ethical practices by upholding self-care as an essential component. Foucault (1994d) notes that working on an ethics that deals with the concern for self is a practice to liberate the repressed. As a counsellor I need to be aware of the risk of dominating others and imposing oppressive power over them. By taking care of the self and being aware of how dominant discourses work, I aim to remain aware of my desires redirecting them through the filter of ethical considerations. The process of assembling this thesis has helped me become aware of the mechanisms at work that shape my identity and how I can use reflexivity in action to create a self that I perceive worthy of care, leaving the fears and doubts that are driven by obsession behind. As discussed in Chapter 1 and in Chapter 5, neoliberalism the latest metamorphosis of capitalism has been described as a hegemonic discourse influencing every aspect of life on the planet. The reach of this discourse seems are so entrenched and far-reaching that it appears inevitable and violent. This thesis adds to the increasing awareness of the destructive force that is inherent in the attempt to commodify the entire planet with this extremely anthropocentric vision. I have linked the neoliberal discourse with my difficulties to maintain self-care and how to find solutions by establishing a sense of agency in the face of this occurrence. Neoliberalism has many facets and changes continuously. I suggest that every individual has different parts of this discourse that they may recognise as

their issue/problem, which they convey, adhere to, or disseminate as truth statements that yield influence over their behaviours and power assertions over others. I also think it is important to recognise the mechanism that Foucault (1988b) and others suggest have influence over who we become. I believe that the identification of hegemonic discourses and the development of related metacognition may lead to emancipation and establishing agency, dignity, and supports to overcome learned helplessness (Seligman, 1975). Relations of power are not inevitably bad or oppressive. It is essential, however, to create awareness of the processes of power. Foucault (1998) indicates that the discourses that assemble social relations simultaneously assist to produce, reproduce and uphold social relations of power. We use this mechanism to make sense of our environment, create behaviours, identity, and even shape our physicality. This has huge potential for change and independence by generating or changing any discourse that we may perceive as solutions. I have also considered material from a number of theorists for instance Wittgenstein, De Certeau, and Siddhartha to find new ways of defining my reality, but acknowledge that it is an ongoing venture. I have used in this thesis a postmodern counselling approach solution-focused therapy to explore solutions to the perceived problems that were discussed in previous chapters. Solution-focused therapy offers a real alternative to purely contemplating the problem and instead creates new ways of thinking and being. As a solution-focused therapy orientated counsellor I have started to internalise some of the principles contained in this modality. I believe in my ability to change myself whilst being inspired by others and in turn furthering their process of transformation as part of a socially constructed project. Researching the voices that argue against the neoliberal/capitalist construct and for something different gives me hope. I have shifted my belief about what is

important in this world and instead of focusing on the efforts of primitive accumulation as the underlying drive of neoliberalism I want to focus on the survival of the eco-system and our position as a part of it, not as the masters of it. To me this existence is not all about profit and power over others but cooperation and simply *to be*. My aim was to demonstrate that self-care is a fundamental component to overcome the neoliberal dogma and establish it as an antidote. I encourage the reader to fight back and take back their lives, their communities, and their land, ultimately protecting it against the selfishness brigades that will continue to attempt to pillage everything.

7.4 - Suggestions for Future Research about Self-care

I see this thesis as a departure point to conduct more research featuring the theme self-care. I envisage that the consultation with other people working in the mental health arena might yield interesting findings in the future and will encourage the emergence of co-constructed new discourses that may challenge the current regimes of truth.

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